

*The*  
**HEART**  
*of the*  
**MOOR**



**Beatrice Chase**

*The spirit of Dartmoor life in a bygone age,  
captured at the beginning of this century by the  
famous and controversial Widecombe authoress*

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Beatrice Chase.

Marian McTulley  
June 1988  
bought at  
The Manor House  
Devon, England









"THE SHRILL VOICES OF THE LAMBS."

*Beatrice Chase.*

# THE HEART OF THE MOOR

BY  
BEATRICE  
CHASE

ILLUSTRATED

"As I gazed, I heard deep call unto deep. Hitherto unknown depths in my soul spoke at last and answered to the call of the moor. This, this was what I had been unconsciously wanting all my life."

**The Heart of the Moor**

John Pegg Publishing



# THE HEART OF THE MOOR

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CHASE

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*A facsimile edition by*



**John Pegg Publishing**



### **Acknowledgements**

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## **BEATRICE CHASE — Authoress (1874-1955)**

**Famous, controversial, eccentric  
– the life of a true Dartmoor romantic**

**Not often will a single book make a writer instantly famous, yet when 'The Heart of the Moor' was published in 1914, Beatrice Chase found that she – and Dartmoor – had become celebrities virtually overnight. The book was an immensely popular success, selling in its thousands both in this country and overseas.**

Beatrice Chase however was not born on Dartmoor, and came to the area purely by chance. Her real name was Olive Katharine Chase Parr, and she proudly claimed descent from the brother of Henry VIII's last queen. Her parents lived at Harrow-on-the-Hill, where she was born in 1874. She was educated at the Holy Child Convent, and became a fervent, life-long Catholic. Later she worked extremely hard in the London slums, and organised the Children's Crusade for the then Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Vaughan.

Unfortunately these efforts proved too much for her health, and she became seriously ill. In relating this herself, Beatrice said that her doctor prescribed Dartmoor as a remedy. Eileen Morgan, though, writes in her invaluable source work 'Beatrice Chase of Widecombe', published in 1974, that she had gone with her widowed mother to stay at Dawlish, and that a guest in their hotel had told her mother to get her away to Dartmoor while there was still time. The Moor and its pure air worked their magic spell, and Beatrice made a full and complete recovery. She always claimed that "the Moor saved my life and transformed me into a robust woman".

Beatrice and her mother settled in Widecombe, and soon decided to live permanently on Dartmoor. A cottage was found in the little hamlet of Venton, just down the road from Widecombe itself, and Beatrice's great desire was to build a Catholic chapel there. She was overjoyed when the Bishop of Plymouth told her that if she did so, he would obtain approval from the Papal Secretary of State for it to be licensed as a place of public worship. She also got the approval of the Abbot of Buckfast, Boniface Nattier, whose monks would serve the chapel. Then disaster struck. Abbot Nattier was drowned at sea, and Venton House proved too small for use as a permanent home. In despair the Parrs put the cottage up for sale. Then one evening Beatrice claimed to have had a spiritual visitation from the Abbot, who told her not to sell but to add a wing to the cottage instead. The work on this and the chapel was completed between January and August 1908, and the first Mass was said shortly afterwards.

Before coming to Dartmoor, Beatrice had written books under her real name relating tales of life in the London slums, with titles such as 'Back Slum Idylls' and 'A Red-Handed Saint'. Now she decided to tell the world about life on Dartmoor, which she loved with a fierce, passionate and enduring affection.

In 1914 she published 'The Heart of the Moor', which became an instant, and international, critical and public success. The Pall Mall

Gazette declared "the book is a notable contribution to the literature of Dartmoor – convincing, vivid and lovable. . . . Wind, sun, storm and shadow play on the moor in these delightful pages. . . . Light touches everywhere prove how deep and accurate is the author's knowledge". The New York Times praised it, saying "Miss Chase shows us Dartmoor from a new standpoint. She makes her reader not only understand but share her love for the moor, and understand too why the inhabitants . . . were all so fond of her".

In 1915 she met the author John Oxenham, who as a result of their friendship wrote a novel published the following year called 'My Lady of the Moor', dedicated 'to Beatrice' – and as 'My Lady of the Moor' she became known from then on. Her fame grew, and so did the number of her books. Readers clamoured for more; 'Through a Dartmoor Window' was published in 1915, and three years later came 'The Dartmoor Window Again'. At the Dartmoor window she would receive the many visitors who made the pilgrimage to Venton in large numbers, sitting enthroned in almost regal splendour and graciously autographing copies of her books. Written in a highly individual style, these gave a romanticised but keenly observed view of a way of moorland life which we shall never see again. Her books had a great success; they were reprinted many times and sold in their thousands.

Visitors also came to worship in the chapel, which was open to all. Beatrice's faith was a great comfort to her following the tragic death in action of her fiancé early in the 1914-18 war – although it was a blow from which she never fully recovered. Her desire now was to help others, and with John Oxenham she established the 'White Knights Crusade' in which servicemen took a vow to keep their hearts and souls pure while on active service. Prayers were offered for them, and their names entered in a specially inscribed book kept in the chapel. The movement proved a great source of comfort to many in an age when people still held to the ideals of ancient chivalry.

The years between the two World Wars, however, saw a gradual change in Beatrice's life. Sales of her books declined as tastes changed, and she ceased to enjoy the visits of people she had once welcomed. Her nature had always been regally autocratic, but became increasingly overbearing and difficult with the passing years. At one point the Abbot of Buckfast was reluctantly forced to bring a libel action against her. Fortunately she retracted the libellous statements contained in a series of letters before court proceedings began.

In her work entitled 'The Voice of the River', published in 1925, she wrote strongly against the excessive profits she felt were being made by booksellers, and from that time she published her own works and sold them direct from Venton. Surprisingly, she was also opposed to the militant feminist movement which grew up between the wars, and



*John Oxenham*



denounced it in an outspoken pamphlet entitled 'Woman's Emancipation (By one who does not want it)'.

In 1930 her interest in photography was channelled professionally into a series of Dartmoor postcards specially commissioned by Raphael Tuck. 'Dartmoor Snapshots', her own publication, appeared the following year. But these activities did not bring the hoped-for rewards; as she wrote, "times are bad, and this photography stunt is as the last plank to the shipwrecked".

Attempts to revive her Crusade in the second World War failed, and the bombing of London dealt another blow. As she relates in 'The Corpse on the Moor', published in 1946, "All my books are out of print, chiefly because of the blitz of December 29th, 1940".

Despite her increasingly difficult nature, Beatrice did what she could for her beloved Dartmoor. Early on she had revived the tragic legend of Jay's Grave, and recounted it in the pages of 'The Heart of the Moor'. Later in 1935, on the day Widecombe Fair was held, she asked the BBC to broadcast the famous song of the same name. This was done, and as she said "Never have such crowds been seen in Widecombe". Strangely enough, though, although she loved Dartmoor so much, she campaigned vigorously against the idea of its becoming a National Park. As she wrote in 'The Dartmoor Window Forty Years After', published in 1948, "Anyone who wants to make Dartmoor a National Park has no faint understanding of her mystery, her glamour and her gloom. To water all this down, to have uniformed officials parading, would be to turn her into an ordinary commonplace urban area". Today this could be considered a prime example of fierce, misguided eccentricity.

Alone in Venton House, she lived the life of a recluse. The Daily Telegraph reported that "She kept a loaded revolver and ammunition in her bedroom . . . and always warned suspicious-looking strangers that she was an excellent marksman". Eventually she became unable to take care of herself, and was removed to Newton Abbot Infirmary, dying two days before her 81st birthday in June, 1955.

In her will she asked to be buried in her Dominican Tertiary nun's habit "at the top of the field known as Hermitage Platt at Venton without a coffin", and she added "please leave the graves of the three little cats undisturbed under the big stones at my feet". In fact she was buried in Widecombe churchyard, and lies not far from her mother's grave. Her memorial stone is a scale replica of Nun's Cross near Princetown. Made of Dartmoor granite, it was paid for by public subscription and erected in 1959. Carved on one side of the cross are the words "Pray for Olive Katharine Parr", and on the other "Beatrice Chase 1874-1955".

**Beatrice Chase was most certainly a remarkable person, with a unique ability to record the authentic flavour of a moorland life in days that are now sped forever. Filled with religious fervour and an indomitable spirit, she was highly principled, at times aggressively arrogant, yet a true romantic at heart. A character the likes of whom, many may say unfortunately, are disappearing in the rush and bustle of today's modern world.**

**For those interested in discovering more of Beatrice Chase's books, all now scarce and out of print, we list below a selection of her titles, beginning with those written under her real name.**

**Books by Olive Katharine Parr**

Back Slum Idylls  
The Little Cardinal  
A Red-Handed Saint, 1909  
A White-Handed Saint, 1913  
The Voice of the River, 1925  
My Chief Knight, John Oxenham

**Books by Beatrice Chase**

The Heart of the Moor, 1914  
Through a Dartmoor Window, 1915  
Gorse Blossoms from Dartmoor (Poems), 1916  
The Dartmoor Window Again, 1918  
Completed Tales of My Knights and Ladies, 1919  
Pages of Peace from Dartmoor, 1920  
Lady Agatha, 1922  
A Dartmoor Galahad, 1923  
Devon and Heaven, 1924  
The Corpse on the Moor, 1946  
The Dartmoor Window Forty Years After, 1948

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**As a famous authoress and truly eccentric Dartmoor 'character', Beatrice Chase appears in the books of many other writers. Two invaluable biographies are 'Beatrice Chase of Widecombe' by Eileen Morgan, and 'Beatrice Chase, My Lady of the Moor' by Christina Green, both published in 1974.**

**Other books in which she features include:**

High Dartmoor—Eric Hemery, 1983  
Portrait of Devon—D. St Leger Gordon, 1963  
Portrait of Dartmoor—Vian Smith, 1966  
Dartmoor—E. W. Martin, 1958  
A Wanderer in the West Country—E. W. Martin, 1951  
About Widecombe—Judy Chard, 1979  
My Dartmoor—Clive Gunnell, 1977



## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

THE manuscript of "The Heart of the Moor" reached me through the good offices of one so well known in the literary world that I decided to read it myself, and at once. There was about it an inspiring air of mystery that piqued my curiosity. I read it and came to a certain opinion as to its merits. I sent it to a "reader," then to another, to a third, and finally to a fourth. All four came to a certain opinion very similar to my own, although, strangely enough, in all four reports there was a "but." The "certain opinion" was qualified by a suggestion that the melodrama, which somewhat overweighted the book, should be modified. I accordingly wrote to the author, pointing out that four expert "readers" had, without consultation, come to the same conclusion that there were certain "slips," my euphemism with regard to the 'fiction' part of the book, and that I found

myself quite in agreement with their findings. I also quoted some passages from the reports that must have more than gilded the pill. The author replied :

“ I am simply hanging my abashed head at all the trouble you great literary gentlemen are taking, and I quake in my pretty slippers at the reiteration of the fact that there are a number of slips. . . . Another ‘ reader ’ complained that there isn’t *enough* melodrama ! Now, you say there is too much. We shall end by having no book at all—a neat production of clean blank white pages, like a smile without a cat.

“ Don’t reveal this to the outside public, please ; but, seriously, the condemned melodrama is as written. We did discover the suicide’s grave one day by accident, long after we had been here. The story was lost until I found Granny Caunter ; the tragic deaths are true ; the man with the iron mask is real ; he’s not a mason, but a thatcher, and he actually thatched our long bullock shippen here ; the scythe episode is word for word, except that it was a billhook ! I was sitting among the roses, and the old man did come

and say those identical words over the gate. My chief trouble is that the thing is so dreadfully true that mother says she will have the furniture-vans ready at the door the day the book appears, because —— will be too notorious to hold us.

“Then the pathetic minor incidents are true, too—such as the little half-finished nightcap, the matchbox in the coffin, the bone ornaments, the little doll, the old will. You see, Dartmoor *must* have tragedy and storm. It is part of her nature, one side of her nature. So when by luck I discovered this true ‘melodrama’ in the midst of a peaceful setting how could I, as an artist and truth-teller, fail to avail myself of it? The book contains mines and mines of truth that I have been patiently exploiting for years. There are a thousand tiny details, such as one horse in ploughing being in the groot and the other on the uncut ground above; the shape of the pupils of sheeps’ eyes; the way to make a Dartmoor fire, which could only be written by one who knows. I submit myself entirely to your judgment, but don’t have alterations made if you can help it. You will

remember, won't you, that I have been on the spot for ten years and also that the 'plot' is a real one? I don't want to set up my opinion against yours, only to show that I *have* reasons for what I have written."

To the letter was appended the following postscript, which seems to have more point than relevance :

"A few days ago, a friend sent me the Devonshire form of good-bye. Here it is: 'Good-bye, my dear, I wish 'ee well and I wish 'ee wiser; but lor, I shall see yu long 'fore that.'"

It is not for a publisher, even when supported by four trusted "readers," to fight against the truth, that is, unless he be specially gifted, and accordingly the truth goes forth; but lest it should be confused with fiction, I have presumed to prefix this note, conscious that the smile that has no cat behind it is obviously directed at a certain publisher and his four henchmen—one of whom, by the way, is a woman.

*(Herbert Jenkins — original publisher)*

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# THE HEART OF THE MOOR

## CHAPTER I

### THE BURNING OF LADY AGATHA

**S**ELDOM in my life have I been angrier than I was last night. Five days ago, for the first time during the last fifteen months, I was torn by business from the encircling arms of my beloved hills and forced to spend, in a lowland town, three bitter, dust-laden days and two nights, desecrated by the clank and flash of the electric tram.

What it was to leave it all ! To leave the dead-cold draughts of the streets, with their icy cross-currents of air at every corner, and regain the vast brown bosom of the moor, whose wildest and coldest winds are always to me as the breath of life.

When we passed Turnpike House and passed through the moor gate, leaving civilisation behind us, how my dust-irritated throat sucked in long, greedy draughts of the moor-

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land air ! How my shrinking ears opened again to the healing silence !

One by one, my pet tors reared their rock-crowned heads in wordless greeting. Distant Bellever, the central tor of the moor, loomed, a dusky, uncut amethyst in the gold of the western sky. My starving eyes feasted on the sight of his triple crown till the carriage dropped below the highest point of the open moor road, and we began the descent to where my hamlet home nestled lovingly against the breast of the hills with all her bright eyes wide open watching for the wanderer's return.

And then the dear old room, with black-beamed ceiling low enough to touch ; my tea-table set beside my favourite easy chair before the red-hot peat fire ; and the March wind thundering in the wide chimney.

I threw off my wraps and sat down, dumb with joy. The darkness of my three days' exile served as a foil to the golden gladness of home-coming. But when I turned to look at the piles of letters awaiting me, peace fled. At the bottom of the heap lay a much-sealed brown paper parcel, unmistakably the size and shape of a manuscript. With a gasp of horror, I sorted the letters till I found the one in Jemmy's writing. I tore it open, my heart beating in hard, painful thumps.

## THE BURNING OF LADY AGATHA 3

Even at that grim moment, my mind clung to an idea that the manuscript might only have been returned for some final alterations. But as I read his letter, the bitter waters of disappointment closed over the head of my last hope. It ran :

“ MY DEAR BEATRICE,

“ I have read ‘ Lady Agatha’s Fate ’ with more care than I ever bestowed on any other manuscript, and I fear my opinion may be odious to you.

“ I will say at once—it won’t do. Mind, there is much brilliant writing, even genius, in it. But this is marred by conventionalities and banal phrases such as ‘ turret chambers,’ ‘ fair ladies,’ ‘ manly figures,’ and the like, which make the style too uneven for any first-class house. Then, the plot is too plotty. It is laboured. And the break, two chapters before the end, seems to give the story a sort of second start. .

“ I am sorry to be so severe. But if I may offer advice as balm to the wound of criticism, may I urge you, strongly, never to enter the realms of imagination ? It is not the world for you. Your vocation is to write ‘ life stuff ’—always. Leave alone earls’ daughters and their fates, and write of life as you see it.

“ If I may go on and speak more strongly, let me remind you how I have, more than once, tried to impress on you that your

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private letters to your friends, full of moor life, are priceless literary documents. Why you perversely pour out all your treasures of mind and heart in a form only for the individual is best known to yourself. But I solemnly warn you that if you go on thus pouring your gifts, your moor lore, into the sand instead of into marble basins whence many thirsty men might drink, you will have to answer for a wasted talent.

“Take the advice of a thoroughly experienced sinner, and write a Dartmoor book. No woman has yet done this, and until one does some aspects of the moor cannot be shown. And write subjectively. This has never been done either, in a Dartmoor novel. Your special aptitude for writing in the first person will in that sense alone make your book unique. Never mind plot. People can get plots from the gutter press, the police news, and the divorce court. What men want is atmosphere. Give us air, fragrance, sunlight, storm. Throw word pictures of the moor on the pages of your book as you throw them on the pages of your letters. Tell all the world what the moor is to you. Cease telling this to just a chosen few. Thousands of your fellow creatures, stifling under modern conditions, will bless you for it. Write of the moor folk as you know them. Paint them as they are. There is no other writer with your splendid chances, your wealth of matter.



## THE BURNING OF LADY AGATHA 5

None other is a landowner, living year after year on his own freehold, among his own tenants, out in the heart of the hills.

"We do not want word pictures like minutely drawn and carefully coloured Ordnance maps. We want a live book of Dartmoor. We do not want geographically accurate descriptions of houses, hamlets, villages, peopled with fictitious characters whose like has never been and never will be on the moor. Here again we want reality.

"Last and best, write as a lover. This has never been done, either. You love the moor, the people, and all beauty, material and spiritual, with your every nerve and heart-beat.

"Your letters are alive with love and beauty. They make one glow with the worship of the hills. And they make one faint with hill-sickness. Devon is the loveliest county in England, and Dartmoor is the heart of Devon. Give it us in a book. Forgive this over-long letter, and believe me,

"Your adoring slave,  
"JEMMY."

I threw down the letter, raging with anger. Jemmy is a writer who sells his novels by tens of thousands, and who is one of the leading judges of fiction in London. Whatever he says is true. It was this which made me angriest. I sent my story to him, relying

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on his affection for me to blot out its blemishes. But, man-like, he would take nothing from me but the best; truth was more than friendship, or rather, was the only real friendship.

It was indeed a bitter draught to drain—the rejection by my friend of the book, which I had hoped would make my name.

“Poor Lady Agatha!” I exclaimed, hacking through the thick string of the packet and tearing off the strong paper. “Come out, you poor darling, and let me comfort you. That horrid man isn’t the only critic in the world. He does talk such utter nonsense. Pray, if you have a house with turrets and rooms in them, what are you to call them? And if a man’s form isn’t manly, what is it? Womanly? As for fair ladies, I suppose we must all dye our hair black.”

I broke off, walked to the mirror and looked indignantly at the sheen of my golden head.

“I do loathe men,” I went on untruthfully. “They protest that they are ready to die for you and yet, when you want something done, like this, there is always some plausible reason why they can’t. Come and sit on my knee by the fire, and let us comfort each other.”

I lifted the manuscript from the table and seated myself, holding it with both hands on

## THE BURNING OF LADY AGATHA 7

my lap. The old room was lighted only by the fire, which gradually conquered and drove out daylight in order to hold her own against the invading dusk.

Great ashen logs burnt on the cobbett, crowned by slabs of ebon peat. For no reason that I could analyse, the sight of the generous fire carried my memory back to the first similar fire I ever saw, which had burnt itself ineffaceably into my memory. Then, from the remembrance of my first Dartmoor hearth, I wandered back in minute detail over every incident of my first arrival on the moor, and the cause which led me to it.

My home was then in London, and I had been overworking in the slums. Besides this, I had had also a great personal sorrow, and the two forces together broke me down so utterly that my doctor declared nothing short of an entire year's change would restore me. The doctor was a Devonshire man, and he advocated Dartmoor.

How well I remember the murk of the morning, when I sat, inert, by the fire of his consulting-room, listening without even the semblance of interest to his enthusiastic words about the moor.

"There is no country like it in the British Isles. It is not like Wales, or Scotland, or

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the lakes, or the Yorkshire moors. It is just its unique self. And the climate—that is extraordinary: all the softness of south Devon, yet with all the bracing tonic of mountain air. Then, besides being hill air, it is sea air—sea air without the irritating salt particles which one gets down on the sea-board. Dartmoor, being the highest ground in the west, gets the full force of the Atlantic gales. As for the country, you have moor, distant sea views, river, wood, and farm. And the people—they are a different race to the rest of Devonshire. You won't find poverty and crime up 'Dartymoor way.' ”

His enthusiasm next took the form of finding rooms for me in a farmhouse far out in the wilds. So, in a surprisingly short time from his first diagnosis, I found myself, one dreary March morning, seated in the Exeter section of the great Cornish Riviera express, watching the pandemonium on Paddington platform, and conscious of little else than an overpowering desire for peace. No doubt I looked a wreck, for, after a time, a kind, elderly woman, the only other occupant of the corridor compartment, moved across to speak to me.

“Be you gwain far, my dear? You look

## THE BURNING OF LADY AGATHA 9

wisht, sure 'nough. P'raps you'm off for a rest ? ”

Her soft liquid voice and quaint dialect seemed to blow through the carriage like a pioneer breath of Dartmoor air. All at once, I became conscious of a distinctly formulated mind picture of the moor ; and my mental vision suddenly beheld an interminable, flat plain of purple heather stretching to the sky, broken, here and there, by groups of black firs. It was a perfectly erroneous impression, as I soon learnt, but it served a good purpose at the time, for it awoke in me, at last, an acute longing for the haven of health whither I was bound. Hitherto, my feelings had been entirely passive.

“ Yes, I am going to Dartmoor, and for the first time.”

To my surprise, she threw up her hands and a flush of emotion overspread her weather-beaten face.

“ Dartmoor ! What part, my dear ? ”

“ Graystone,” I replied wonderingly. “ Have you ever lived there ? ”

“ No, no, none of us. Us be Plymouth people, born and bred. But Dartmoor is the heart of the west country, as you might say, and us be properly mazed 'bout the moors, us Demshur folk.”



Then she subsided, quivering with emotion and evidently filled with thoughts that could not be translated into words; while I pondered upon the strange spell exercised by a place where she had never lived and which had the power so to move one who appeared to be an eminently prosaic specimen.

At Exeter she left me, with many good wishes for my welfare, and repeated admonitions to look out for Hey Tor Rocks on a certain side and section of the line.

Then came the journey, in the slow train, first round a portion of the sea-board, through incomparable Dawlish, with her red cliffs standing knee-deep in sapphire sea. We had left the murk behind us in London. The March sun was shining, pale and clear, on the good red earth of Devon, and on her crystal sea. My spirits rose at the glorious riot of colour, and I changed my seat so as to see the very last glimpse of the coast. At Newton Abbot there was a change into the little train which threads her way along the outer fringe of the moor, and I began to watch for my first glimpse of the unknown uplands. But I was forestalled by a small boy, who was with his parents at the other end of the carriage. From the time we started, he had been eagerly looking out,

## THE BURNING OF LADY AGATHA 11

and at last his shout of exultation brought his father to the window, followed by his mother. Hearing some disjointed words about "Hey Tor," I rose and approached. They at once made way for me, and looking out, right up on the skyline, I saw three far-off shadowy shapes like hills with something sharp and irregular at their summits. Very unreal they looked—almost like the half-ruined ramparts of some once enchanted castle.

"Are those the rocks?" I asked vaguely.

"Yes," replied the man, glancing sharply at me. "Hey, Saddle, and Rippon they call they three—the eastern sentinels of Dartmoor. When you'm past they, you'm right on the moor. I reckon everyone on the train is looking out on this side now."

"They look a very long way off," I said doubtfully. "I wonder if they are anywhere near Graystone."

"They be miles from Graystone, but, for all that, you must pass them to get there."

I strained my eyes till the weird gray shapes were lost to view, then returned to my corner to reflect again upon this strange spell, irresistible it seemed to be, exercised by the moor upon humanity. Impatiently,

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I watched for the little station, and jumped out eagerly when the train drew up.

It was towards sunset, I noticed, as I waited for the one leisurely porter to collect my bulky luggage: a typical March evening, cloudless, flat and colourless, with a white haze low on the land, a haze which meant east wind and fine weather.

At last my possessions were loaded on a trolley, and we passed through the white wooden palings into the quiet country lane outside. A farm cart in charge of a youth stood at a short distance, and close to the exit was a smart looking brown spring-trap.

"That be Farmer Coombe's, and he's coming to meet 'ee. Him, coming out o' the other gate," explained my porter.

I turned to look, and the moment I caught sight of the old man, my last foreboding as to the nature of the Dartmoor folk vanished for ever. He came towards me as fast as some slight lameness would permit, a plump figure of medium height, with square, massive shoulders, and an air of placid strength. He was clad in a gray tweed suit, with a white collar, a watch-chain and a black billycock hat, the very type of a prosperous farmer.

He gained my side with a smile of welcome

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and a smart touch of his hat. Then, when I extended a timid hand, he shook it gently in a huge fist absolutely square and as brown as a coffee-berry.

We mounted into the trap, side by side, and I kept up a flow of chatter, interspersed with eager questions, partly to excuse many long looks at him and partly to force him to turn to me. It was indeed a face worth watching, worth painting: the type of face unseen in any city. It was the product of many generations of men and women reared far from civilisation under primitive and normal conditions of existence. The extraordinary thing about the face was the wrinkling. Never before had I known that wrinkles could be beautiful. These were, for they were not the work of care or sin or want. Round his eyes they formed a delicate network, woven from much gazing at great distances and expanses; on his ruddy cheeks were the deeper laughter lines, while on brow and neck were the deep imprints of sun, snow, rain, frost, wind—nature's great artists, who for over fifty years had been working, unchecked, upon the living canvas of healthy, firm flesh. The face was so rugged, so strong, so calm, so formed by a long life spent on the eternal hills under the open sky, that it

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gave me a fore-knowledge of what the moor herself would be really like.

At first, the road led through a winding lane flanked by bare silver birches, which had climbed, here and there, to the top of the massive, irregular walls, rich in mosses, lichens, stonecrops, fern and the promise of countless flowers. But the way led always upwards till at last the lane narrowed, with an air of finality, and stopped altogether at a gate which Mr. Coombe got stiffly down to open.

This was the moor at last. I looked eagerly round and my mind-picture of the flat purple plain fled away before the reality.

We were on a lonely white road, which still ran upwards across a wild desolate tract of land, broken continually with huge irregular masses of granite and scored by the deep scars of miniature ravines. Here and there, groups of rushes and bright green moss shone like emeralds among the prevailing brown of dead bracken and heather, while on our right, though still far ahead, Hey Tor reared his horned head like some antediluvian monster deposited by the flood upon the hill. On and on we went, past this extraordinary creation, until a turn of the road brought us close to lordly Rippon and



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revealed the western heights of Dartmoor rolling to the uttermost limits of the skyline.

I felt myself gasp. It was so desolate, so vast, so eternal. These tors had looked calmly down upon countless generations of men and would still look down on countless generations to come.

There, through unnumbered ages, had they stood, watching the first coming of man and the passing of the centuries, each with its own special problems to fret the human ephemera of the day. As I gazed, it seemed to me that even King Death himself must doff his crown to Dartmoor. She stands impervious to change, in the great silence and the great peace of eternity.

There was on the uplands that evening a wonderful green after-glow in the west, against which the far-off tors rose, peak after peak, chain after chain, like the low, accessible spires of the celestial city. In the foreground rolled a stretch of dusky land which was cut off from the ranges of peaks by a valley full of ghostly mist. Close to us lay a large pool beside whose black, still bosom, rushes swayed silently in the evening breeze. On every side the land rose and fell and rose again, like a green ocean flecked with granite foam, while in all those miles

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not one living being or human habitation could be seen.

Farmer Coombe had pulled up to let me gaze my fill, and I sat, without one word, till the unutterable peace of the moor had soaked itself through every tired sense to the very centre of my heart and bones and brain, calling forth such a psalm of silent thanksgiving as my soul had never before uttered, a thanksgiving that I had at last been permitted to find one great tract of my native land as untouched by man and as fresh from the hand of God as in the days of creation.

And with the inspired thanksgiving came the comprehension of the magnetic attraction, the irresistible spell of Dartmoor. I felt her, like a living thing, twining herself round my very heart-strings. Then and there, I realised that this place was my fate, that if ever I left her she would draw me back to her heart, and that if I should resist her my own heart would break.

As I gazed, I heard deep call unto deep. Hitherto unknown depths in my soul spoke at last and answered to the call of the moor. This, this was what I had been unconsciously wanting all my life. The quivering compass of my destiny had found its pole-star.

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Another poor exile had at last come to her rightful home. Speech was impossible. Mr. Coombe was the first to break silence.

"Look," he said, pointing with his whip.

A small, dark human figure had entered our line of vision, the figure of a bent old man. His back was towards us and he was slowly, painfully traversing the rough plain leading to the valley. He was lame and spent and leaned heavily on a stick, the very type of tired old age.

" 'Tis what us'll all come to, some day," murmured the liquid voice at my side. "At the end of the day we shall each come to the edge of this rough world and go down into the valley of death full o' the mist that a body can't see through; and, after us have crossed it, the heavenly city with its many mansions up along."

Still, speech for me was impossible. Amazement at this unexpected metaphor from a working farmer struggled with the desire to give way to an outburst of tears, and it took me a long time to regain my composure.

We reached the farm at last, where Mr. Coombe's kindly daughter helped me to descend and led me to the great fire on the open hearth, my first Dartmoor fire.

\* \* \* \* \*

Suddenly Lady Agatha slipped off my lap with a crash. A gunshot would scarcely have been more startling. I had been reliving so vividly the scenes of ten years ago, that I was bewildered at the return to reality.

I slid down on the hearthrug after my manuscript, and then noticed that the fire needed fuel, so I remained kneeling to lay a handful of faggot wood on the hot embers. Logs of ash came next, logs with their gray-green rind and tassels, or dry lichen, still clinging to them ; then, crown of all, pieces of " fag " laid on top downwards so that the flame might catch the dried grass and the sprigs of gorse and heather on the surface before penetrating to the fibres within. The grateful embers sent up a volley of brilliant sparks, then opened their hearts to the good things I had given them. Soon, dainty little flames were flitting, like will-o'-the-wisps, through the loose fringes of the fags, turning each grass-blade and heather-bell into a thing of transparent light. I listened to the liquid music of the flames, music, after the first hissing is over, exactly like the ripple of running water ; I breathed the scented smoke more fragrant to me than any incense : I watched the sprays of heather turning to deep, clear, vermilion fire flowers ; and as I



*Photo by Beatrice Chase,  
taken with Kodak I.A.*

"FOR THE COBBIT FIRES."





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looked, my evil temper fell from me, driven out by the sight of my faithful moor consuming on my hearth, burning herself for me that I might be warm. In all seasons, at all times, the moor has never failed me. She has always been life, life itself, to me.

“Jemmy is right, Lady Agatha,” I said huskily, as I knelt. “Aren’t men always right? I know what Dartmoor has been and is to me, and, shame on me, I resent being asked to give her something in return. Ten years ago I came to her, broken in mind and body. She grudged me nothing, and now I grudge her even the tribute of a book. Look at me ten years ago, and look at me now. I am full to my finger-tips of life, health, happiness; every minute of the day is a joy. My home is perfect, a precious little pearl set in the ring of the hills; it is mine, every stone and straw of it, and no one can turn me out. Its land is mine, with all the acres of beauty and fruitfulness. I have got my heart’s desire—life on Dartmoor till death. And even then my happy bones are to lie at last in the lily-bed outside this wall, with the arms of my hills around me till the end of time. I shall breathe the breath of Dartmoor till my last sigh. I shall drink her waters, warm myself at her fires, live in her

bosom, and then become earth to earth with her at last.

“ Yet all they ask me is to speak out and say what she is to me—to speak out for the sake of those to whom she is equally dear, who thirst for news of her, exiled as they are in cruel cities and even in strange lands.

“ And think, Lady Agatha, what the men of Dartmoor have done for me. I was a stranger, and they took me in. I came to them sick and sorrowful, and they gave me of their best. When we settled here and bought this place, how they cared for us! Humble, hard-working men they were, to whom money means much. Yet, in all we spent, in all the building and mending we had to do, not one sixpenny-piece were we allowed to waste. They safeguarded our interests when we were too ignorant to do so ourselves. They advised us how to save money, right and left, when such advice meant less in their own poor pockets. One and all, they served us with a service that no money can ever repay, and that only God can reward. And I grudge showing them as they are, these men of Dartmoor who minister to my every need and who will make my coffin and lay me to rest in their native soil, faithful to me to the very end.

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“ Now I am going to lay you, Lady Agatha, as a burnt offering in the centre of this moor fire. And, to-morrow, I begin my book and will put into it the best I have to give. Every line shall be alive and I shall call it ‘ The Heart of the Moor.’ ”

Then I stirred the fire to yet greater heat and laid the manuscript right in its red, red heart. I covered the pages with a fag for burial and watched it burn to ashes.

A thick manuscript takes a long time to burn, and night was reigning when I rose from my knees at last. I went into the hall, took down the shabby old tweed cloak that always hangs on the oak umbrella-stand, ready for my continual journeys into the open, and undid the west door. The wind had fallen asleep with the sun, so King Frost was already tracing, with his deft fingers, wonderful designs of ferns and seaweeds on the glass panes of the porch. I stepped round the house and up on to the rising ground in front. The silverest of full moons had risen in the east behind Hound Tor, whose pitch-black rocks, like a group of mammoth dogs, loomed spectral against the clear sky. Just over the long lines of thatched roofs swung the Plough, and myriad star lamps of heaven flickered as if all her windows were wide

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open to the airs of earth. The farm hamlet lay sound asleep, with the thatched hood of every building pulled down to its very eyebrows. Our house, the farm house, the cottages, the farm buildings, even the humble linhays—each and all sheltered some warm, happy, well-fed form of life. Half-consumed ricks of bracken, hay, and oats gave silent pledge of plenty still to come before next harvest time.

There was only one sound—the ripple of the stream which has been life to man and beast for countless generations. And around all stood the sable hills, encircling us on every side from the invasions of civilisation.

Thus has the old hamlet stood, farmstead and homestead, for many generations. The granite walls have sheltered many a newly married pair, have seen many a placid corpse borne to the village graveyard. Countless lusty children have been born under the thatch, born for joy or sorrow, good or ill.

Thus may it stand unchanged, harbouring life, animal and human, for many generations still to come.



## CHAPTER II

### GRANNY CAUNTER'S SPRING-CLEANING

A GLORIOUS March morning, sunny and still. Sun and frost are both reigning, not in rivalry, but as king consorts over Dartmoor. All round the thatched roofs hang icicles of various lengths and shapes. Some are twelve inches long and almost as thick as my wrist. I lay in bed early this morning admiring them. The thatch comes down so far over the upper windows of the old houses that I can lie at ease and contemplate my own roof.

The window which faces my pillow is always open and uncurtained, and its crown of thatch is my first weather-glass of the day. Sometimes my eyes open on rain, when each straw has its own bright drop of wet; at other times, the reed is dry and the dusk moor beyond is lightened by sunshine; more rarely, glittering icicles hang in a fringe half-way down the little square window panes. I never wonder that the sun, hot though he

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is, has not the heart to drink them up. It is unimaginable, the beauty of the dark, velvet-soft brown roofs edged with long spangles of crystal, which flash back the sunshine for gratitude that their lives are spared.

All along the edges of the stream, King Frost does marvellous work. Where the joyous flood dances and splashes, showering tiny sheets of spray up on its banks, Frost deftly catches the water wherever it falls and transforms it into his own crystals. Every grass blade is set in a glass case; each clover leaf is a crozier of crystal; every twig is inch-thick in stainless ice which faithfully follows every bend and knot in the wood. Frost is too true an artist not to follow Nature. He never improves on her outlines. The excrescences on the bare boughs give him a lot of trouble, and to show the curves of some knot or other he often has to spare an extra inch of material to render the right angles. But spare it he does, and even encloses the lichen without crushing one tiny hair-like frond. On these miracles, too, the sun looks gently. He knows that such work is beyond his power to accomplish, and he is too great in his own line not to respect the skill of a fellow artist in the other. Often

I wonder how he and Frost manage to reign together so amicably, for it is, indeed, a mingling of summer and winter in one.

Owing to the hard ground, ploughing has been temporarily abandoned, so the men are carting hay from the ricks into the tallat against the next wet day: and, as I stood bare-headed in the shelter of the fragrant rick, the sun was hot on my hair. But for the clothes I was wearing, I might have thought it June. How pleasant it is, this winter hay-making! All through the short, cold months, when we get a sunny day, the hay carts are out and away to the ricks, and the shrewd air is rich with summer odours. On a Dartmoor farm, sunshine and summer never really die. Strictly speaking, March is not winter if one counts by the long days, the promise of buds in places, the shrill voices of the lambs all around, and the first rehearsals of the birds for summer's full orchestra. But on the moor spring reaches us late, just as autumn, at the other end of summer, stays with us almost to the end of November.

The hills are always loth to doff their winter mantle of seal brown, and even by the end of March there is not a " reem " of green visible. Yet the gold of gorse blossom begins to flame

more plentifully ; yellow lambs-tails swing from the hazel bushes and silvery palm buds gem the bare, polished limbs of the withy. Everywhere is the thrill of awakening life. The day, the season, the earth, all are young.

As I stood by the rick watching the men deftly plying the great long-handled, broad-bladed hay-cutting knife, a voice broke through my meditations.

“ Oh, if you please, Miss Beatrice, grandmother would like to see you any time. Hers bin turning out some old rummage her thought you might like to see.”

The invitation was alluring enough to beguile me away even from the sunshine, and in five minutes I was seated by grandmother's chair.

She is one of the passing generation of this moorland village, and her every word is dignified by the weight of years, of experience, of sorrow, of labour, of life—no less than by the approaching shadow of heaven's kindest angel. Each winter may be her last, and, for my own sake, I dread the passing of the dear old folk. We shall never see their like again, and I doubt if those of my generation could come into touch with them anywhere but on Dartmoor. They are, in every sense, the product of a day that is dead.

Civilisation made no attempt to reach the moor until twenty-five or thirty years ago, and, when it came, its limited work was swiftly accomplished, with the result that only by the old folk are we linked to a past which in other places is past indeed. Very few have seen the changes which Mrs. Caunter and Mr. Coombe have: rarely does one get the opportunity of probing the depths of a *living* memory which dates back, for all practical purposes, three generations.

Granny greeted me warmly, as she always does. I am now the only young person of her acquaintance with the slightest love for the past, and she delights in speaking of it to one who cares.

“Good-morning, miss,” she began, in her soft, slow way. She speaks very slowly for a Devonian. Usually their speech is rapid and flowing, the very contrary to the slow drawl of the North of England—rapid and flowing and oh! how musical. It seems in some occult way to be allied to the moorland streams. Get a couple of moormen, too far from you to distinguish words, and listen only to the notes in their liquid voices. You will find precisely similar notes in the rapid purling of the little streams. No water flows slowly on Dartmoor, neither does the speech

of her children. When a man is bellowing at the pitch of his voice to the cattle, or swearing earnestly at the dog, there is never a harsh note or inflection to be heard. Dartmoor curses are immeasurably more musical than many people's blessings. I shall never tire of making Devonians talk to me. To do them justice, they are not backward in the art. Meet a farmer, start him on some congenial topic, and you may then prop yourself comfortably against the nearest hedge and enjoy a half-hour's flow of language unchecked by one pause for a word. I often do this, not so much for what they say as for the way they say it.

The softness of consonants, the lilt of the vowels, the turns of the phrases, the rise and fall of the inflections, are as fascinating, and irresistible, as the actual quaintness of the words used and as the real melody of the voice.

I opened my greedy ears wide, as I sat down by Granny's chair. She was surrounded by an unwonted litter of motley articles, and was uncommonly garrulous.

"Us have been turning out for spring-cleaning," she began deliberately. "And knowing you'm so mazed 'bout old-fashioned things, us thought you'd like to see a few 'fore they be put back again."



I looked at the beautiful old face under the lilac sun-bonnet. All day long, and all the year round, indoors and out, Granny wears a sun-bonnet. Her face is not wrinkled like Mr. Coombe's. She has not been exposed for fifty years to the weather. Her skin is smooth and fine, like a young child's, and all its bright colour is now collected in a delicate network of tiny veins, as though time has worn away the surface skin and left revealed the secret place where Nature prepares her living rouge. You never see this colour veining except in the cheeks of the aged.

I looked at the dear old face. I looked at the precious relics of a bygone generation which were lying beside her. And I realised that I had stepped from the sunshine of the young world outside, into the shadow of a life to which all the world is old.

"Tell me all about everything, Granny," I insisted, choking down a lump in my throat. "What is this?"

It looked like a small wooden doll, messed and dirty, in a dress of stout canvas, the whole of which had once been covered with sea-shells. The lady's skirt was of little limpets, her leg-of-mutton sleeves of minute things like cockles, and her bodice of still tinier cowries.

"That, miss. is a doll that belonged to Lady Drake. And they reckon her mother before her had it as a baby. I was in service with her when I was a maid, and after her was dead this was thrown out on the rummage heap, so I saved 'en."

"Do you mean that notorious Mrs. Drake who had her husband buried in a pig cloth?" I exclaimed.

Granny stared at me, speechless with amazement.

"There is an account of her in some history of Dartmoor," I continued, "and it says she was a dreadful woman who hated her husband and grudged him even a winding-sheet. Have you never read the story?"

"No, and no need to, thanks be," she responded with withering scorn. "I baint able to read at all, and no lose neither if they put such old rummage as that in printed books. 'Twadn't true, miss. Don't 'ee believe it. I was there when Mr. Drake died, me and Mrs. French her was afterwards. Her's dead now, poor soul. And us laid 'en out our two selves, poor gentleman. And missis, that was Mrs. Drake then, gived us her best linen sheets and a fine linen shirt to put on 'en. And two great cannles too, to burn all night

by the bed, and in they days cannles cost something. 'Tis a shame to tell such old crams, and in a book too."

Mentally I said rude things about Dartmoor guide-books, then returned to the contemplation of the poor little doll and tried to date its probable beginning.

"Mrs. Drake's mother had it when she was a baby? And Mrs. Drake died thirty years ago, at the age of seventy? But, Granny, the doll must be over a hundred and twenty years old!"

I gazed sadly at the pathetic little object which had outlived so many lusty babies and whose own end was now so perilously near.

"This be the fork and spoon my mother had to her christening," the old lady went on, picking up the two from the table. They had engraved edges and were marked with two sets of initials. "They must be over a hundred years old, too, I reckon. In they days, each one invited to the christening would put a little together to buy a present for the baby.

"And this old plate I bought to a sale in one of your own cottages, miss, more'n forty years agone. 'Twas an old man whose wife had died, and he was forced to sell up the home and go in the Union. He was

eighty and he said 'twas either his wife's grandmother's or great-grandmother's. He couldn't rightly mind which. But it must be quite two hundred years old, I reckon."

I took it up and looked closely at the design. There was no maker's mark of any kind and the pattern round the edge was a wreath of brilliantly coloured flowers and birds, one tint being a vivid orange, a shade I have never before seen in china. Its origin is hopelessly lost.

Next, she took up a little white drawn linen cap and turned it round in her knotted fingers.

"This be the last bit of sewing my poor mother ever did," she said at length. "'Tis a night-cap. Us used to wear they, for years ago. Her died 'fore her finished 'en. There 'ee be with the needle just as her left 'en."

I took it. Yes, the needle was there and was even threaded. It was thick with rust, as well it might be, for it had been waiting nearly fifty years to complete the unfinished stitching.

"These be some bone ornaments carved by the prisoners of war at Princes Town—real gentlemen some of them were, sure 'nough.

“ Many died there—never saw their wives nor children again. Us used to save the big bones from the meat and give them to be carved. The poor souls were some glad to earn a few pence. One of they belonged to Mrs. Drake. You can see the letters ‘ C.M.B.’ That was her maiden name, Caroline Mary Broderick.”

We sat silent for some time. Granny had slid into a reverie and I was too moved to speak. As we sat, the sun swung round to the little low window and laid a long golden finger gently on the unfinished night-cap.

“ Please God, they’ll put that on my head to bury me,” she resumed, noticing the silent caress. “ ’Tis finished enough for I—more finished now than it would be if ’twas properly finished by another person’s hand. Us buried one little thing with my poor mother, too. For years ago, there didn’t use to be matches like us have now. Nor lamps, nor oil neither, for that matter. Us made our own cannles out of fat, with a cotton wick, and rushlights for going to bed. A kind of match us used to make, out of little sticks dipped in brimstone.”

“ Did they strike ? ” I asked, as she paused again.

“ Ah, no. To kindle a light, us used the

flint and steel in the tinder box. That was a box of dry rag, and us would scrape flint and steel till there comed a spark and the spark would catch the rag and then us dipped the match into that. And the men, winter-time, always carried the tinder box and strips of brown paper soaked in saltpetre, for to get a light for their lanterns. Well, and I can mind when the first box of matches, proper striking matches, comed in. Endacott's father used to take the cart round Tuesdays, same as his son do now. 'Twas he brought the matches for sale. And my poor mother was so taken up with her first match-box that her kept it till her died. And when her was laid in her coffin, I tooked and put it in alongside of her, so's no person else shouldn't have it. 'Twas a little red box made of wood.

"Great changes, sure 'nough," she babbled on. "Now 'tis four boxes of matches for a penny and lamp oil brought to door each week. Up to the inn, I hear tell, they make their own gas now; and Mr. Dickson has the electric light everywhere, they tell me, worked by the river. Well, well. 'Tis changes from home-made cannles. And all in my time.

"Mr. Dickson went by yesterday in his



motor-car. There's changes again. When I was young, if us travelled, 'twas by waggon and two horses, with no seats. Just sit on your box and travel like that, day and night. No trains in they days. I haven't never seen a train. Yes, and I can mind the first carriages coming in. Every person 'ud run to door to see a two-wheeled trap—what us call spring-carts and such like. Now 'tis carriages without horses, even, and us scarcely looks. The gentry goes in their motors to station, and it's Lunnion now in five hours, they say, what with motors and express trains."

At this point, Jenny, the grand-daughter, entered, to ask for the keys. The girl's head bristled with curling-pins, and her grease-spotted skirt dragged on the ground behind her. A washed-out and shrunken blouse had wriggled up her back, leaving a vista of undergarments. The old lady looked at her in eloquent silence, and, when the door was again closed, at me.

"Maids was some different, too, when I was a maid. No such thing to be seen as a dirty twoad like she. Us weared our hair as God gived it to us, straight or curly as He pleased and always done the same way—parted in the middle and a tress on each side

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taken round to back and tied with a ribbon. A tress is what you'd call a plait. And all the year round, blue print dresses with a little white spot. Sixpence a yard it costed, and us wore the dresses cut low round the neck with a little square print kerchief under it and short sleeves. Weekdays, us weared poke-bonnets, the shapes cut out of cardboard and covered with the same print; an' Sundays, straw poke-bonnets that us plaited ourselves. And in winter time a red cloak over it."

"Oh, Granny, what pictures you must have been! And what a pity it has all gone out."

"Ah'tis, sure 'nough. And the men, boys and all, wore they smock frocks with the honeycomb yokes. Kept 'em clean for their work and washed beautiful every week same as our print dresses did. Now 'tis they dirty old woollens, and cheap boots no better'n cardboard and brown paper. 'Tidn't to be wondered at that the maids have always got colds. When I was a maid, us used pattens that kept us up out of the mud. Us was clean and dry. Now, 'tis a proper show to see the maids go by to church, Sundays. They gashly blouses a'll over imitation lace, and their skirts trailing through the dung, and hats so big as an umbrella

with half the poultry yard in 'en. And then they reckon they'm gentry."

I leant back in my chair and laughed till I was tired. But Granny's severity remained unabated. There she sat, in her lilac sun-bonnet, with an enormous clean apron over her knees, and a woollen cross-over shawl round her shoulders, the very type of a clean, thrifty old dame. Contrasting her with the recent apparition of Jenny, I understood how aggravating she must find the girl's ways.

But indeed, it is no laughing matter, for the constant friction between them makes life unhappy for both. It is the clash of the old and the new. Granny tries to train her grand-daughter as she herself has been trained. The old body knows no other methods and her heart is sore when she finds that she has outlived her day. Jenny, like most girls, resents the strict régime which makes her hate what she calls old-fashioned ways, so there is the clash between the poor old woman, who has apparently lived only to be a burden, and the impatient young one who is wanting a husband and home of her own.

I said good-bye at last, and turned at the door for one more look before leaving her.

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It was a long, bare, upper room, with fireplace and window tucked oddly away into one corner. There she sat, leaning a little forward with her gnarled hands crossed over the head of her stick. Her dim eyes were fixed on the pathetic relics, some of child life, some of generations even above her own, some of war and bloodshed. The poor little doll lay close to a bone fish carved by some soldier's hand. And the first owners of each relic were every one of them passed to the world of the dead.

## CHAPTER III

### THE CALL OF THE LAND

**K**ING FROST has left us. His reign was brief. My infallible barometer is racing down towards thirty, and the wind is back in the south. These things mean rain, so, this morning, I breakfasted at half-past seven, to secure one long, last day of sunshine. Sunrise and sunset are these days each about six o'clock, as they are in September. And it is glorious to see how much nearer north are the sun's risings and settings, and how much higher from south he is at noon.

In December, he hugs the south, lolling all day on the dusk purple-blue couch of Holne moor, as if high heaven has lost its allurements. In June, measuring by the ridge of moor, east and west, that forms his bedroom window-sills, he rises two miles nearer to the north and sets two miles nearer to it than in December, and strides like a giant to the centre of the sky for noon. I know

each rock on the moor behind which he sets and rises all the year through. But my Lady Moon, womanlike, is contrary to her liege lord in all her ways. His summer chambers are her winter ones. In summer, it is she who loves the south, while in December she rises and sets in the sun's forsaken chambers of June.

By eight o'clock I was in the open, where I met Betty and Bertie, so we wandered straight away into a wonder world.

They are twins of six, small tenants of ours, and, when not at school or at work, they bestow their invaluable attention upon my neglected education. It sounds preposterous to speak of work in connection with a child of six years—unless you are intimately familiar with the average moor child. Already small Betty has what is called "a working apron." Aprons here are of many grades, and of many shapes and colours. The "working" apron, which means that life is real and earnest, is made of sacking. Betty wears hers for sweeping and dusting. These arts, as far as her limited height allows, she has learnt thoroughly, but her real talent lies in washing-up. On one memorable occasion when her mother was helping a neighbour for the day, Betty was found standing on a



stool, washing up the breakfast things to admiration, all greasy plates and frying-pan kept to the last, with soda added to the water for them. Soda is not used, by the best housewives of six, for the ordinary china, because it fetches the gilt rims off, in process of time. Since that day, her mother has developed her education along other lines. Mere sweeping and dusting was too elementary for Betty. From the age of two, Bertie has lived with his father in the fields and farm-yard, and what he now does not know about farming is not worth knowing. More than once, this spring, I have heard him speak severely to his own father upon the subject of a choked gutter in one of the meadows, and three days ago, when they had to unthatch a portion of the hayrick before cutting more hay, Bertie advised them to save the reed, as it would come in again for ricks in the autumn. Upon such occasions his father stands stock still, staring helplessly at the imp in a manner which makes me weak with laughter. The child is always so absolutely right that nothing is left to be said.

But Bertie's special line is sheep, especially at lambing time. "Back along," one very rough night, a farmer over the valley saw a lighted lantern bobbing about in Yonder

Mallow Meadow where our sheep then were. As he looked, suddenly the lantern went out, and a fellow-feeling made him wait to see if Jem West had remembered matches. In due time the light reappeared, and continued its merry jig, in and out among' the ewes. Some days later, the farmer learnt accidentally that the lantern-bearer was not Jem West, but his small son of six, who, before bedtime, had gone to see if a specially pet ewe had lambed. From that time there were grave doubts as to whether a child of six who remembered his box of matches was not altogether too good for this wicked world.

When we were re-thatching some of our roofs three years ago, Bertie was well to the fore. To save the master-thatcher much climbing up and down the ladder, an underling was engaged to cut and sort the reed into bundles and to hand them up to him. After a time, Bertie, then aged three and not yet breeched, persisted in carrying these bundles from the underling to the foot of the thatcher's ladder. We all begged him to desist, but he was obdurate. It was piping hot weather, and his small crimson, flower-like face was dewed with moisture. From the back view, all that could be seen was an upright bundle of reed, propelled by a pair of little boots

topped by red socks. Every day for a fortnight he toiled, and at the end of the time, as he had been a material help to the men, on pay night he received his wages with them. It was probably one of the proudest hours of his life, and I need hardly say that even for such services as his, he was heavily overpaid.

This morning, they both greeted me with effusion. On Saturdays we have a tacit agreement to meet during some part of the day. Bertie's demeanour to ladies is one of my dearest studies. Betty is grandmotherly. She assumes that I know nothing about anything and while I am in her charge it is her business to see that I don't damage myself.

"Us have got some birds' nestays to show you," cooed Bertie, in greeting. "And I found 'em all myself."

"Don't you want your hat?" interrupted Betty severely. For some obscure reason, it always shocks Dartmoor folk when one goes about bare-headed.

"No," I answered firmly. "If you had lived for years in a town where you can't put your uncovered head outside the door, Betty, you would never wear a hat again, any more than I do."

Betty screwed up her little mouth into a

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red pout of disapproval and followed her brother in silence, I meekly behind her.

Bertie led the way to a bank, pointed out a tiny round hole, hardly visible among the mosses, and commanded me to look in. I did so, and when my eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, saw a sweet little face, and two bright black eyes within three inches of my nose. The mite was as still as if dead and stuffed. I drew back softly.

"Oh, Bertie, how beautiful she is. It's a little Mrs. Wren and she is sitting."

He nodded, in approving silence.

"You won't tell any of the other children, will you?" I pleaded.

Betty looked at me with scorn. "N-o-o. Other children would poke out the nest and break the eggs. Us never tells."

"I'll show you again when her's hatched 'en and then you can see if us have told," chimed in Bertie.

I knew they were to be trusted. Never once have I known them even to frighten the parent bird away from her nest. One of the joys of spring is to be personally conducted by Bertie round to many nests, and part of our unwritten code is to watch till the baby birds are safely hatched.

Bertie next led the way to a high hedge,

and tried to point out another nest. But my town bred sight was slow, and it was long before I could discern the wonderful thing, poised in the bottom branch of a hawthorn bush, which had been ingeniously used as the main support for the long, deep nest, marvelously woven of grasses and moss. The outside was a thick coat of dry, gray-green moss, and its shape was perfect, wide at the top and tapering to a point at the bottom.

"That be a blackbird's," explained Bertie. "If you climb up and look in, you'll see the eggs. Mother bird be out, just now."

So I climbed and saw them, three exquisite things of blue-green, the hue of a faded turquoise. The inside of the nest was lined with what might have been a green tapestry, woven or knitted in a perfectly even stitch.

"Oh, children, isn't it wonderful? How do they do it, without hands? The choice of position, the shaping, the difference between the inside and the out. Surely, birds are the most wonderful of all creatures."

Then we passed through the moor gate, up over a stretch of turf speckled with granite and flanked by gorse bushes. Betty, with her usual calm conviction that I am a natural, stopped beside the first gorse bush and cautioned me against ever trying to sit on or pick

gorse. She explained its thorns, and caused me to feel one as an object-lesson. Then she took my hand again, and we followed Bertie to a strange little nest built on the ground. It nonplussed even him. In that position it might have been many things, for we have whole breeds of birds peculiar to ourselves on Dartmoor. Lapwings build on the ground ; then there are field fares, larks, and a host of others, whose names I do not know. Bertie considered this particular nest to be a skylark's. Its inhabitants were hatched and four open mouths greeted us, terminating in four small, bare bodies.

"They'm hungry," remarked Betty, producing a piece of cake from her pocket. "Gie 'en a crumb, Bertie."

I doubted the wisdom of the proceeding, but he carefully dropped a minute particle in the nearest mouth, and waited. It was not swallowed, and after a short time the recipient began to roll slowly over, as if fainting. Its mouth was still open and the crumb still there.

"Take it out, Bertie," I said hastily. "It's choking it."

He obeyed, and to our relief the creature righted itself and was soon none the worse.

"Never, never feed baby birds again," I



said severely. "It's too intricate a proceeding except for their own parents, and if they choose to choke them, we are not responsible. Now let's go and see Daddy ploughing Homer Mallow."

Every field on every farm has a name, and many of the fields are twins and named in pairs. Sometimes "Higher" and "Lower," is used to distinguish them. But a prettier distinction is "Yonder" for the meadow furthest from home and "Homer" for the nearer one—such as "Yonder Mallow" and "Homer Mallow."

We reached the field through the usual muddy gateway, where Betty showed me how to step, and were soon following the plough. Ploughing is easy enough till they reach the end of the furrow, and then it is always an unsolved mystery to me how the ploughman keeps things out of a tangle.

He has to manage the two long rope reins, the two handles of the plough, and its two coulter. He must turn the whole concern, reverse the coulters, and get the horses back into the furrow, without tripping them over the chains. Yet I never saw a farmer who ever gave himself airs about it. If I could turn a double-knived, two-horsed plough, my conceit would be unbearable. Another

thing I love to see is the trundling down of one horse into the furrow, while the other walks on the uncut ground just above. Some horses are cleverer than others about it. To-day, Pilot was the chosen beast, and she has a way of doing a little pirouette with all her clever hoofs together, as she lollops in. Some men plough in silence. James West keeps up a perpetual solo, the entire day. The name of each horse is shouted at intervals, tempered with such remarks as "Wugga," "Wh—e—a," "Now then," "You'll get it d'rectly." I need scarcely say that neither horse ever does "get it," because James is devoted to his beasts.

Homer Mallow is not a flat field. In fact, we have not a flat field on the entire farm. But this one has a noble rise, a swelling slope, which when you are in its middle, hides both hedges from view. As we mounted the slope, the farmer looked back and I pounced.

"James," I said with mock severity, "I seem to have heard that a man putting his hand to the plough and looking back . . ."

He interrupted with a laugh. "Maybe, in other countries, but 'twould puzzle the Almighty Himself to plough Dartmoor fields if a mightn't look backwards when a can't see forrards. Us can't see the coming hedge

yet, so a man can only steer by the hinder one, if he's gwain to cut a straight furrow. Reckon the Lord knoweth and maketh allowance for the poor Dartmoor farmers," he said, with a twinkle. "Wugga, Pilot. You'll get it directly."

After a time, I wandered away to the higher side of the field, which is bounded on three sides by the unreclaimed moor. Our farm reminds me of a many-fingered hand. The palm and wrist with the throbbing life-blood is the houses and court. The fields are the fingers, stretching north, south, east and west, and there is a dear squat little thumb of an orchard, where the ricks are made, and through which the stream sings its happy way.

From Homer Mallow hedge one could take a header clean into the bogs which press lovingly close to its high wall. In March they are still very full, so the moor's face shone even more brightly than the sky. From countless pools was the sunlight flashed back to the blue, while tiny rivulets made music and movement among the silent, immovable boulders. The expanse rose slowly up to my pet Dream Tor, who crowned it with her coronal of blue-gray granite. A pasturefield bounds the fourth side of Mallow,

and in this green enclosure was the flock. Crazy lambs were dancing, intoxicated with the sunshine and the joy of living. The gambols of an energetic lamb are more like the movements of a marionette than anything else. It has a way of stiffening its disproportionately long legs till no joint will bend, and then hurtling across the field in a series of rapid jerks, evoked apparently from its belly muscles, exactly like a creature being controlled by wires from above. When a sedate ewe condescends to romp, her movements are precisely similar, only much more ludicrous in a heavy animal. It is curious why sheep will never willingly put their feet into water. I have often watched an entire flock cross a rivulet on the moor, and however heavy or lame they may happen to be, every one will jump the water rather than walk through it. The curious position of the pupil of a sheep's eye gives it a strangely short-sighted expression. Instead of being upwards or perpendicular in the iris, like a cat's, it is right across or horizontal. The eye looks to be made in two pieces joined in the middle by a long black seam.

After a time, I turned again to watch the ploughing from a distance. It was a pretty sight: the rich, deep chocolate-coloured earth



*Photo by Beatrice Chase,  
with Kodak 1.A.*

“A STRAIGHT FURROW.”





turning up so evenly from the bright, curved knife; each newly-cut layer, being damp, gleamed like silver in the sunshine, and the children trotted along the silver rim of earth behind their father, with a covey of little wild birds behind them, and half a dozen fat white sea-gulls behind the wild birds. Nowadays, the gulls visit us daily on Dartmoor in ploughing time. But they are well-behaved and honourable birds, always allowing pride of place behind the plough to the native denizens of the soil, who cannot return at evening for a fish supper before going to roost.

How many generations of men have ploughed this fruitful earth round which the great hills fold their arms so tightly. It is a beautiful thought that we might well erect a monument in every country village to honour the unnamed sons of the soil who perform their humble yet necessary duty, unnoticed and unsung.

Dinner-time came in due course. I had planned a moor walk for the afternoon, but the lure of the plough was too strong, so I tramped backwards and forwards, hour after hour, until the day was far spent, and the great field was finished. No one knows what it is to me, to feel my own land under my feet,

to see its rich brown secrets exposed to my loving gaze, to smell its sweet breath full of fruitful promise. Some people buy books, others old china, or silver, or pictures, or jewels. My mania would be land: land with its latent, mysterious, intangible life, its incomprehensible capacity for producing food for man and beast: land with its myriad flowers, its own peculiar robe of grass. Often I throw myself down in some field or other, to bury my face in its clean, cool bosom, or kiss its wholesome mouth. Often I stretch wide arms to its boundaries, longing to take to my heart its every tree, flower, bush, butterfly, rivulet—all the countless forms of vegetable and animal life that even one field contains. I know our fields love me just as the moor loves me, and the tors. In their own way they are as alive as I. There is no such thing as “inanimate” nature. Everything is alive, in its own individual way. But if it does not just happen to be our own form of life, we thick-headed pigmies call it no life at all. Ah, I know better! I know that something in the land answers silently to my call, thrills to the mighty forces of the love I pour out on it. My hills have given me back my health and life, and they love to feel and hear my happy footfall. Land for me, and earth—

and let it be always Dartmoor earth, till I myself return to earth therein at last.

So all to-day have I followed the plough till the horses were brought home, and it was tea-time for us all. But in spite of my aching legs, I was constrained to go out again to watch the moon rise. For that, one need not stand, so I took my old tweed cloak and a deck chair out to the bare sycamore that stands with her feet in the stream. There I sat, alone, and the water sang her sweetest song while the moon rose over the dusk rim of moor, and the swaling fires were lighted, one by one round the hills. Here, one flared as yellow as ripe corn ; there, another glowed scarlet against the sable hillside, while, at times, I could see the figures of men and boys silhouetted for a moment against the flames.

Suddenly, a heavy touch on my knee gave me an unholy shock. It was Ben. Ben is the senior sheep-dog, wise, patient and sympathetic as it behoves all elderly sheep-dogs to be. He is short-haired, cream-coloured, and his tail is a stump, just long enough to agitate at the sight of a friend.

His eyes are curious, one having a white iris and being, it is supposed, defective in vision. Ben has a curious inability to see a rabbit even close under his nose in a hedge. He has

not the heart to kill anything, and we all know it. But we all pretend that it is short sight, not softness of heart. Ben is a dog utterly devoted to duty. Other sheep-dogs sometimes take a day off without permission, and go rabbiting with other gay dogs. Ben is never out of earshot of the farmhouse. It is impossible to beguile him for a walk. He will accompany one fifty yards or so, along either road, but in spite of all beseeching, he turns back, at that distance, to make for the house again. His duties are many and varied, and concern sheep and cattle. The farm could not be worked without him. Each farmer is allowed to keep two sheep-dogs, free of tax, because they are an absolute necessity.

This evening his work was finished when he joined me under the sycamore. I greeted him with delight when he sat down in front of me and gazed with deep thought into my face—a trick of his. Often I quail when I meet that sad, calm look.

“Oh, Ben!” I almost sobbed, throwing my arms round his neck for a moment. “You admire me, I know. You can’t say so in words, but you convey it more clearly than by mere speech. You think I am your superior, a being altogether above you, moving upon a higher plane. But am I

really so very admirable? Isn't it really yourself you mean? Am I always kind, always sweet-tempered, always ready to do my duty? Am I always willing, day and night, even at eating and sleeping times, to abandon my own affairs at a word? Do you ever say, 'Don't bother. I can't come. Do it yourself. I'm tired'? Are you ever irritable, morose, snappish, disobliging? Oh, Ben, which is the nobler animal, you or I?"

For answer, he laid a heavy, dusty paw in my lap and continued to gaze.

"Ben," I continued, "we must go in. It is getting late. Day is over. Night has come. Sometime, Ben, night must come for you. Every dog has his day, you know, but however bright the day, evening must close in at last. Your willing feet will have performed their last journey. Your happy, cheerful, invaluable life will be over—and then? Then another dog will take your place and, with the passing of time, you, oh, faithful friend and servant, will be forgotten. It is the common lot, Ben, common to men and dogs alike. Let us hope that all men, like all dogs, will have their day, in fullest measure, before night falls."

## CHAPTER IV

### THE OPINIONS OF FARMER COOMBE AND SOME POSTAL CONVENIENCES

**N**OT for nothing did my barometer race down to 28. All last night the moor was laved and lashed by a belated equinoctial gale. Through my open casement window on the north side, I could hear the hoarse, deep voice of the south wind, and the beat of her mighty pinions. Against my south casement the rain washed like sheets of sea spray. In summer gales, when the leaves are out, the voices of the winds are semitones higher and shriller, but in the bare boughs the notes are deep like the bass strings of a giant 'cello. Dawn revealed low clouds, veiling the rain-darkened velvet of the moor, clouds forming the gray garment of the storm which she dragged recklessly through trees and hedges till its hem was torn to fringe.

At breakfast, I opened the dining-room door that leads into the garden. The room



faces east and is therefore sheltered from the teeth of the south wind. Every bough and bush was washed clean from March dust, and earth smelt her sweetest in the balmy air. How kind they are, these drenching south-west storms, whose warm wet is forced by the wind like a spray bath through every crevice of wall and tree.

Some cheerful sparrows and a morose robin breakfasted with me. The robin is a Socialist. I can no longer shut my eyes to this mournful fact. He is distractingly beautiful and poisonously wicked. He does not care the least for crumbs. Farinaceous food is entirely distasteful to him. He was worming on the cobbles till he saw a sparrow come in for crumbs. At once, he left a half-dug-up worm, rushed in, drove the sparrow out, and seized the bread. When he had it, he did not know what to do with it. Even if he had wished to eat it, he could not have swallowed it all, for there was enough for a family. But that is his disposition. Rather than let any other bird have anything, he will take it himself, though he does not want it, cannot use it, and though there is enough for them all, if he did want it. There you have the Socialist.

After breakfast, I gave myself up to a  
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prolonged ecstasy of housework. How I love my home! And how my home loves me! Just as the land loves me, so does the house in her own special way. The sturdy walls hold me in their arms to shelter me from cold and storm and heat. Often I kiss their glistening granite in gratitude for their unfailing shelter. The gold-brown thatch loves to spread wide her covering above my happy head. And the red hearts of the wide hearths joyously pulse forth warmth and light to cheer me. I love to give her love for love—to serve my home as she serves me. I love to let in the air and sunshine through her windows, to clean and beautify her with flowers, to minister to her countless needs. What a tyrant a house is, and how, woman-like, I love its tyranny! A house is like a man: there is always something a woman can find to do for him. Some women swear by hockey, golf, or bicycling for keeping themselves in condition. For me, there is no joy, no healing, like housecraft. Since I came to live on Dartmoor, that is a new joy of life. I watched the women here, their strength, their perfectly developed muscles, their unfailing health, their long, long lives. And I sorrowed that I was a wretched gentlewoman who was dependent on servants and

had never been brought up to work. Timidly, and by degrees, I tried my hand at different things never before attempted. Of course I had been thoroughly trained by my mother in every branch of housework. That is part of a gentlewoman's education. It is only the plebeians who are "too much of a lady to boil an egg," and "too intellectual to make a bed." But a thorough theoretical training is not the same thing as practice. Moreover, my health in London had rendered any continuous manual work impossible. By degrees I ventured into every department of housecraft, and now, in spite of my outdoor life, our many visitors, my continuous literary work, I keep certain duties in my own hands—cooking above all. For health, there is nothing like some work which must be done, and done to time. Things that you can put off have not the same value. Half the value of manual work lies in the regularity with which it must be performed. Another precious factor is the truth that the so-called manual work requires intellect. Why is it that the stupidest girls are put to housework as though it is all they are fit for? Take cooking alone: look at the brain work required to be a competent cook—to turn various masses of raw, dirty, repellent objects

into a clean, nourishing, appetising, desirable dinner! Apart from the intellectual exercise it is, there is also the intellectual pleasure. If you are living with someone whom you love, a wife with her husband, a mother with her child, think what joy it is to sustain the beloved life with nourishing food. Think of the joy of clean rooms, bright silver, hot fires, well-washed clothes. There is another thing I have learnt on Dartmoor—the art of ironing. Always I wash my own white summer dresses, and I get just double the pleasure out of them than if they had been done by a laundress. Ironing is another high art: to know just the right stiffness of starch, the right degree of dampness of the article, the right heat of the irons, lest they stick.

Another advantage of regular housework is that it is independent of weather. One's muscles are used all the year round and never have a chance to get out of condition. Of course, it ought to be regulated to allow of many hours in the open. I, for instance, combine ten-mile walks with my other duties. But I confess I am far prouder of being able to do thoroughly well every branch of housework than I am of writing books. To my mind, there is no question as to which art

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requires the greater intellect. Often I wish sadly that all women could experience, as I do, the joy, the health, the healing for soul and body that come by the service of home and kindred with one's own hands. Often do I pity men who can never know this happiness and whose ways of showing love are consequently so limited. No woman is a true and fully developed lover who cannot do everything for her menkind that they need.

I spent the morning, as I say, in an ecstasy of housework. Some were tasks that could be postponed, and they had therefore been allowed to slide for the sake of the fine weather. I felt how glad each room was to welcome me again, and to give itself up to my care. Each had its own little troubles that only I could put right. How I love them all! They are so old, so quaint, so kind, so homely. The house is mentioned in Burke as existing in 1560, and how much older it may be than that, no one knows. There is not one ugly line throughout. And it is all so obviously *hand-made*. There is not a machine-made door or window in all the place. No two sides of any room are pairs. No two angles ever match. The walls are built of chunks of granite of countless shapes and sizes. The two-storeyed porch, if it were painted by the

greatest artist exactly as it exists, would be condemned by the Royal Academy as "out of drawing." One wall is higher than the other, the points of its roof are not pairs, and the window and door do not pretend to be set in the middle, or even one above the other. Oh, and the picturesqueness of the house, its warmth, its weather-tightness, its healthiness, made, as it was, by patient human hands with the help of only the most primitive of instruments.

So we spent a blissful morning together, the house and I, and by lunch time the storm had departed with the suddenness of most equinoctial gales. At two o'clock, the hour when farmers return to work after dinner, I went out to see what offered, a favourite trick of mine. I love casting myself adrift upon the farm-world and following the first trail I strike. Upon this occasion it was thrashing. I found James harnessing the horses to the machine, preparatory to their slow walk round and round in a circle outside the corn barn under the great beam, and Mr. Coombe, with a prang inside the building, ready to feed the engine with rich bundles of golden wheat. It makes the weirdest wailing, does the thrashing : a sound so sad, so uncanny, so unaccountable, that when



first I heard it, years ago, I thought it really was a Banshee wailing at the windows in a minor key of utter despair.

I seated myself on a bundle of straw at the back of the barn and settled myself for a "tell." As usual my insatiable ears were craving for the lilt of Dartmoor speech, after some hours of starvation; and besides this, I specially love to make the old folk talk of bygone days. Granny Caunter does this to perfection among the women, and Mr. Coombe among the men.

He and I have much friendly sparring about the dialect. He, being wise, is immensely proud of it. Some of the young and foolish ones are ashamed of it and will not use the "gude" old words. And, even among those who adhere to the speech of their fathers, it is heart-breaking to hear how the Board Schools are stamping out the phraseology peculiar to the country, substituting for it a mongrel lingo of weak Cockney, spotted with vulgar Americanisms.

Mr. Coombe delights in calling to mind quaint words with which to puzzle me, and maintains stoutly that his is the real old English and mine some half-bred language, ruined by foreign expressions. I often wonder if the old man is right, just as I often wish that

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some sage would find the derivation of our Dartmoor words. Two learned men have searched dialect dictionaries in vain for me, and the words are still without origin. For instance, Granny Caunter will tell of the "centles" of fish they used to bring home from market years ago. She pronounces it with a hard "c" like "kentle." This centle was a hundredweight. And a common phrase now is "hundreds of room," "hundreds of water." The cover of a book is a "ferial," and I wonder vaguely if it dates back to the days when books were bound in iron, "fer." Their exclamation of emphasis "No, fey" is probably a clipped form of "No, fai(th)." Ploughed earth is called the "grout." A horse's bridle, with blinkers, is called a "mop bridle." "To ride" is to drive in a conveyance. "Riding hackney," is to ride on horseback. Why "hackney" I never can conceive. A "straw mot" (pronounced strummet) is a single straw. "Loo" is sheltered, and the noun "looth," shelter. "Stoor" is dust, and "stoory" dusty. Twilight is called the "dimpsey." It is really a different language from the ordinary English. For instance, if a labourer met you and remarked that it was stoory in the grout to-day, but loo enough under the quickbeam

hedge, and his maister sowed the wuts suent, sure 'nough, he would mean that it was dusty in the ploughed field but sheltered under the hedge of mountain ash, and his master sowed the oats uncommonly evenly. "Suent" means smooth or even. Of course they cannot spell any of these words. All one can do is to take them down phonetically. The most hopeless of all to identify are the names of birds. A yellow-hammer is a golden gladdie—O melodious title! A wren is a kitty tope. A thrush is a gray bird, a water wagtail a dish-washer. After that, incomprehensibility. For instance, there is a bird called an "oode walse." It is nearly as large as a magpie, black with a few white feathers. That I cannot identify. Then there is a "tud picker," something like a sparrow. It is not a wood-pecker or anything like it. A "hackey eye" is something like a wren, and is a small brown bird living always in woods, and laying ten to twelve small eggs. They never heard the name "chaffinch," though we simply swarm with them, and as I have never yet been able to catch a man and a chaffinch together, I have no idea what they name them. Marsh marigolds are 'ducky flowers,' wild orchids are "snake flowers" because of their long spotted leaves, and laburnum is "golden chains."

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Mr. Coombe has two bugbears—drink and education, so-called.

Countless times has he told me that “the penny press is the ruination of the country,” and knowing in my guilty soul how much too frequently I write for this penny press, on such occasions I always quail before his mild brown eyes. He complains bitterly that “the byes and maids fill their heads with such rummage from the papers that the byes can’t put a new stick in a rake, nor the maids boil the tetties.”

He forgives my literary tendencies for the sake of my skill in housecraft.

For a time I watched. The old farmer looks scarcely any older than when he met me at the station upon my first arrival, ten years ago. His hair is a little whiter, perhaps, and some of his beautiful lines a trifle deeper. Otherwise, he is unchanged. His handsome son, walking round outside with the horses, crossed our line of sight periodically, and I compared his face with his father’s. They are much alike. The young man wears only a light brown moustache, no beard as yet, while his features are more delicately cut than the old man’s, and his smooth crimson cheeks bear no lines. He has the small chiselled nose and finely formed head which

one sees so often in Devonshire. I always say that, next to their voices, I envy the men of Devon their noses and profiles.

"Well," I began, by way of throwing down the glove, "the world goes better now than it did in your young days, doesn't it, Mr. Coombe?"

"No, fey," he responded with a twinkle. He was quite aware he was being drawn. "In my young days us would have taken thiccy corn to miller's, had 'en ground for bread, and made 'en into loaves, baked in camp kettles under the vags. Now us must buy foreign flour what be half chalk, and give our own corn to the beasts. And as for a good brown barley loaf, us have nigh forgotten the taste of 'en. 'Tis the baker's cart twice a week, with the fine, close loaves what unt fit for the chickens even."

"But why this thusness?" I clamoured. "Why don't you do as you did then?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"'Tis the maids, I reckon. Wut with always snipping at their dresses to alter them to fashions in the penny papers, they unt got time to bake the bread. And if they do, the English flour be too solid and takes too long. They must have the light, fine white dust that rises quick and is soon done."

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He paused to speak to his son, and then resumed his work and his dissertation.

"And if a farmer don't grow his own corn, 'tis cheaper to buy foreign, that's another thing. Foreign wuts be eighteenpence or two shillings a bag cheaper than what the English be. And look at the wool. For years ago, there was a big demand for Dartmoor wool, and now the foreign wool be crowding us out. That's cheaper, too, than English. But at first they couldn't get the quality for to compete with ours. So what do 'ee think 'en did? Why, bought our sheep, took 'en to France, bred 'en a bit and then sold back the wool to us off our own sheeps' backs. In my feyther's day, the living at Merryvale was worth £1,200. Now 'tis £750, the difference in the tithes."

I pondered sadly.

"Couldn't the English farmers sell their stuff for less and get back the market?"

"Ah no. 'Twouldn't pay us. Wages is too high. They pay less wages. Their workmen lives on less. Our English workmen must have butchers' meat every day, which us didn't in my young days, not more'n once a quarter. But I tell 'ee the truth." He lowered his voice impressively. "The English labourer must have his beer nowa-



days. I wun't say he drinks too much, but he'll spend four or five shilling a week in beer. And then there's his baccy. 'Tis like this, drink is only fit for the gentry. The working man can't afford it, even if he don't drink too much. For years ago, the gentry used to drink like fishes. You'm more sober now. But you taught the working people to drink, and in this generation they'm follering your example."

He paused, wiped his forehead and lapsed into thoughtful silence. I said nothing. For one thing, it is not easy to hold a sustained conversation above the wailing of the thrashing machine. For another, what was there to be said?

After tea, I went to the village. It is half a mile from our hamlet, but it is not much more than twice as large. There are eight or nine houses, including the post-office, inn, and forge. We have no shops, no doctor, no station, no public clock, and no carrier. Butchers, a baker, and a grocer travel round to us weekly from the lowlands. Mails come daily, on foot, and it takes four strong postmen to serve this tiny place on account of the distances. There is a friendliness, a kindliness, a confidingness about postal arrangements in these parts which would

electrify the G.P.O. if they could see and hear. The postman is everyone's friend and beast of burden. He brings messages to and fro, does errands, carries bottles of medicine, pays money into the bank, cashes cheques, does fifty odd things for us poor savages up among the hills. He is an invaluable public servant. Each moorland postman has a whistle with which he humanely warns houses of his approach, both coming and going. And we have, also, a system of signalling him to stop by means of a stick decorated by a wisp of scarlet, which is stuck up by the gate.

To cash a cheque in the village is a matter of time and patience. If we are stranded without cash, we send a cheque to someone or other, and the village clubs together to cash it. We give the cheque, one day, to some individual, after which instalments dribble in for several days, sent by various messengers—anyone who happens to be passing. How they ever settle up afterwards is a mystery.

All affairs here are leisurely. The postmen, being townsmen, complain bitterly that our public motto appears to be "To-morrow's coming." On their rare visits to the outlying farms with some half-penny circular that the farmer probably cannot read, and would not

want it if he could, they say they are asked the time. They reply, "Twenty-five past," and are staggered by the query, "Twenty-five past *what*?"

One postman tells a tale of an old native of Graystone, who rode down to the town one day, put up his horse in a properly leisurely manner, sauntered into a shop, passed the time of day with the shop-keeper, bridle on arm and then enquired, incidentally, where they kept the fire-engine.

"Why?" asked the man, thinking the old fellow wanted to see it.

"Oh, only that my house be afire, and I reckon 'tis time I was moving on."

History does not conclude the story, and, personally, I believe it to be a malignant libel on the character of our villagers.

But it is interesting to see how, at one time, they must have been a self-sufficient race, these Dartmoor folk. In each similar village there was every craft necessary to life. The farms raised practically all the foodstuff required. The miller ground the local corn for local bread. They made out their own reed for re-thatching, and the village possesses a thatcher, a carpenter, and a mason. The carpenter, in old days, made the coffins, or "chests" as they call them, and there is, of

course, a forge, so that nearly all the needs of men and houses were met. The Dartmoor farmer himself is an all-round genius. I am still endeavouring to find things which he cannot do.

At the post-office can be procured various things connected with the postal trade. I remember once going for several postal orders, but none of the required amounts were forthcoming, so the jolly post-mistress, who was engaged on more important matters, handed me her entire stock to take home and go through at my leisure, till I could make up the necessary sum. I returned the remainder that evening, but it would probably have been all the same if I had kept them a week.

The real joy is the telegraphic system. It is now possible to send telegrams by telephone to the town, and as the wire is an overhead one, it sometimes leads to complications on account of the noisy moor winds. Occasionally the name of the post-master instead of one's own is appended to some wire to one's dearest friend, which throws him into a state of hopeless bewilderment. Also there is a system of spelling each word which always seems to me intricate—needlessly so, considering the noise of the Dartmoor gale in the wire. The various letters of the alphabet

have a rhyming sound, such as, for example, "t," "p," "b," "c," "e," and the harassed telephonist always uses a Christian name in illustration. Thus: "Doctor wanted to-day." I once listened to the transmission of this message. They got through "Doctor wanted" after much shouting, but "to-day" was too much for them both.

"T," began our post-mistress.

"P," replied a cheerful voice, "right."

"T," shrieked our end, "not p."

"Not what? I can't hear."

"T," roared our end again.

"I keep telling you I've got 'p.' What next?"

"T, t, t, not p. T for Thomas, T for Thomas," said our end twenty times in desperation.

"Doctor wanted, Thomas," chirped the other end. "Yes? That all?"

I could not stay to hear the end. I left our post-mistress clinging, speechless, to the receiver, waiting till adequate language should occur to her. Whether the doctor ever came, or whether the patient got well or died before his arrival, I never heard.

Another engaging feature about our telegraphic system is its publicity. Messages are shared for the common good. Everyone

assumes, in the friendliest way, that you are glad to transmit your news indiscriminately. A former village constable used to complain bitterly that if ever he should get a wire to arrest anyone, an event never yet known in Graystone, the contents of his telegrams were always known by the entire population long before they reached him, and the "wanted" man would be off before any constable had his chance. I tried to soothe him, I remember, by pointing out that no one ever required arresting. It seemed to me a meeting of troubles half-way. I also remarked that everyone, even out in the road, could hear the remarks at the telephone. But my sympathy was useless. The thing always rankled.

Our constable lives in a guileless old thatched cottage with Madonna lilies growing under its windows and a cage of doves hanging in its porch. They label it "Devon Constabulary." Otherwise, no one would ever connect it with the Force.

There is a clock of sorts at the post-office. It is a cheap American thing without a glass, and the children play with the hands, when they can reach them. So it is hardly reliable. In old days, before clocks and watches became cheap and general, men told the time by the sun-dial on the south porch of the old



church. And when the sun did not shine, why, there was no time that day. *Horas non numero nisi serenas.* In that happy past there were no hours except sunny ones, which recalls a motto on the Devon china, "Life has many shadows, but 'tis the sunshine makes them."

## CHAPTER V

### MY MOTHER THE MOOR AND PREACHER JOHN

**M**ID-APRIL at mid-day on Dream Tor.  
That was life this morning.

At first, I lay full length on the dry turf at the tor's feet—full length with one ear pressed against the bosom of my moor, listening for her mighty heart-throbs, and for some vibrations of the countless forms of life that she bears within her. Often I listen for the subterranean murmur of her innumerable rivers, especially for the voices of the four great streams of Devon which rise among the hills. It is incredible that one can lay one's head against the bosom of the moor without hearing some stirring of the strange, beautiful, mysterious river which cries, yearly, for a human heart, and which gives the moor her name. In olden days this country used to be called "the Dart moors." Even to-day, the oldest people only consider Dartmoor to be just the land along the banks of the Dart. But, according to modern ideas, the empire of the

Dart has become extended to the twenty miles known by the one word—Dartmoor.

I lay listening, but, as usual, hearing nothing. Human ears are too dull to catch many of Nature's harmonies. So at last I sat up to watch for the first swallows, and listen for the first cuckoo. Both appear between April the seventeenth and twenty-fourth. For that week, we are all eyes and ears, especially the children. Moorland children take a keen interest in the cuckoo because he is used by their mothers as a kind of calendar. Coughs and chilblains will go "when cuckoo comes," and all infants begin their school-days at "cuckoo time." New children are always first sent to school at Easter, because the finest of the weather is to come, which softens the usually long journeys for little students. The association of the cuckoo with school would, to the unreflecting, tend to make him a dreaded visitor. But, as a matter of fact, the children love school. I do not know one child who prefers holiday time.

There is no cuckoo clock in the village, so when mine first arrived from London he was overwhelmed with attentions. Children, married women, gray-haired men, all flocked to see him. One morning, I remember, we

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brought in a small tenant who was nearing school age, it then being only the month of February. He was about four, and had heard mysterious rumours of the advent of the cuckoo. We fixed twelve o'clock, as we always do for children, because the cuckoo is longer out in the open. The little fellow came in, stationed himself in front of the clock, and watched with big, puzzled eyes the little shut door under its eaves. At the strike, out shot the cuckoo, did his twelve calls, each with the usual bow, bounced back, and slammed the door behind him, with the smack that always makes me wonder why the hinges hold. He never has one second to spare. The tiny tenant underneath stared up, absolutely speechless, then took to his heels, and tore home, shouting, "Mother, mother! I must go to school to-morrow. Cuckoo's come."

There was no cuckoo to be heard this morning on Dream Tor, and no swallow to be seen. But there were other things—ah, things enough to fill a lifetime. The tor's real name is not, of course, Dream Tor, or anything like it. I call it that, because it is my favourite home tor; on it I have seen my sublimest visions, dreamt my divinest dreams. It is not marked upon any Ordnance map, thank

heaven, and no tourist ever comes near it from year's end to year's end.

An unusually frank Ordnance officer once visited our hamlet, and told us that they do not even pretend to survey all Dartmoor. Whole tracts of country and many tors are entirely omitted. They satisfy themselves with the roads, the principal tors parallel with them, certain rivers, some large tracks, and all villages and hamlets. He explained that our moor-tracks are known to us natives, who do not, therefore, need information about what would be practically impossible of explanation upon any map, even if there were a sufficient number of "foreigners" brave enough to use them. My Dream Tor is one omitted, and may she be for ever unknown.

To the south slope blue Holne moor, bounded at last by the great Shoulder of Brent Tor, beyond which I could follow the far dim coast-line round past Dartmouth, Berry Head, Brixham, Mary-church with its twin spires like two white fingers against the sky, on to open Teignmouth on the east of me, with its blue bay, and broad silver river, spanned by the black bridge to Shaldon. Between me and distant Teignmouth rose the faithful sentinels, Hey, Saddle, and Rippon. North of east were the crouching heads of

mighty Hound Tor ; due north, the olive and russet slopes of the moor ran to the top stone of Hamildown ; to the west lay that finest vista of all, the tract of land between Widecombe and Tavistock, with lordly Bel-lever standing peerless in its centre, heart and king of countless tors that gather round him as a bodyguard. At his motionless feet wind the two Darts ere they meet west of Sharp tor and thence flow, wailing, whispering, laughing, muttering to the hungry, waiting sea.

As I sat, brooding, the mountain ranges of dove-gray clouds were slowly rolled over my head to the east by the irresistible might of the unseen west wind, and, as they passed, here, there, everywhere, on the face of the moor, fell mysterious shadows like the raising of a mighty unseen hand in silent blessing over the earth.

Then, as I watched, the sunlight fell from heaven upon a glittering palace far in the west, a crystal palace obviously peopled by fair ladies and gallant knights.

That is what it looks like in the sunshine. Strangers who first see it exclaim and ask what is this Palace Beautiful? And how they shriek and shudder when they are told it is the grim, gray convict prison of Princetown. How they upbraid the heartless sun for what



their hasty judgment considers a cruel jest. They think it more fitting that the dark walls should loom sinister through a weeping mist. Yet, which in reality is best? Surely the hopeful sunlight which gilds the dreary place, not in mockery but in earnest of some happy future awaiting every weary convict whose cell window flashes quivering gold messages athwart the dusk rim of the tor-crowned hills.

My reverie was long and deep. It always is, when I can see the prison. But it was interrupted by the approach of a figure, at the sight of which I could not restrain an exclamation of delight. Preacher John had evidently seen me and was coming towards me.

Preacher John is a mystery. No one knows his rightful name, or home, or origin. His might almost be another voice crying in the wilderness. All we know is that he has lived many years in a little one-storeyed stone hut out in the wilds near one of the central newtakes—the sort of place occupied by the “moormen” who tend the cattle during the summer months. Preacher John is no moorman in that sense, for he has no occupation. He simply lives alone, summer and winter, in his tiny, clean hut, with its black peat fire. In winter, like the moormen, he wears a

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sheep-skin with flowing fleece and always carries a long stick. To-day it was too warm for the sheep-skin, and he was dressed as any farmer might be, but, as usual, wore no covering on his head. He is clean shaven, and marvellous eyes look out of a face like alabaster. His hair is silver-white, and its sheen, with the clear skin and the eyes like great soft stars, all suggest light. To me he looks like a rare, delicate porcelain figure with a lamp inside it.

Many and wild are the stories told of him. He is thought to be mad, and one tale says he was once a parson who was crossed in love, had brain-fever, and never recovered his faculties. But no one knows. If he is mad, I wish we were all less sane. Unquestionably he is a gentleman. Why he is called "Preacher" I never quite know, for he does not preach in the usual sense of the term. I have never known him set foot in church or chapel. But he carries always a worn testament in his breast and never does he hold converse with man, woman, or child, without speaking of love. To him, all the world is love. Love dwells alike in the caressing sunshine, and the deadly thunderbolt. Life is love, and, not less, her sister Death. His whole being, so to speak, runs to love.

He wanders erratically about the moor, avoiding the places with fashionable hotels, and frequenting only the quiet villages and hamlets that are off the beaten track. He often comes to Graystone and the people fight to take him in. He seeks shelter always in some humble farm or cottage, avoiding any inn or gentleman's house. And the folk say Preacher John never goes without leaving some blessing behind him.

I rose and went eagerly to meet him. He greeted me with his usual radiant smile and laid his right hand for one moment reverently on my bare head.

"Take an old man's blessing, Miss Beatrice, if you will. It cannot harm you. I see that you are well."

"I am indeed. Is this the first time you have ever visited my Dream Tor?" I asked, turning to re-climb the low rocks.

"No, no," he answered, with another smile. "I knew your Dream Tor, as you call it, years before you were born."

We stood on the summit, I looking up at him, for he is a tall man, and he gazing at the glittering windows of the prison.

"Love, love, love," he murmured to himself. "Love, dost thou ever fail? On this whole moor what building ever shines as fair

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as yon, darkest of all? Ah, Love, it is thou alone who knowest where thou art most needed—there in the darkest places. We men shun the abode of crime. Thou, divinely wise and tender, dost seek it out, for there art thou most sorely needed.”

Then he fell silent, and stood gazing with tear-dimmed eyes and parted lips long, long across to the western moor.

Never do I presume to profane such silences by speech. I stood, quiet as usual, and as near to him as I dared approach, almost feeling virtue go out from him into me. At last he laid his hand again on my head, and, without a word, turned away to resume his journey over the trackless moor.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE SUICIDE'S GRAVE

**A**ND now I have stumbled upon tragedy. I went yesterday to Hound Tor—the finest rocks on any part of the moor with which I am acquainted. Hound Tor is several tors in one. The rock is in colossal pillars, with long stretches of turf between; it is in chaotic masses, with vast slabs poised in a way that makes one fear to approach lest they should crash down in a deadly avalanche and grind one to pulp beneath them. On the north side they are sheer cliffs, with one deep cleft, a hundred feet high or more, cut into the side of the great tor by the vindictive hands of fire and earthquake. All Dartmoor is of volcanic origin, and on many tors one can see the awful stabs which were inflicted on the still unhardened rock by the swords of subterranean fires. As one stands on the northern side of Hound Tor, looking down from the top of its cleft, one is amazed not to find the sea below.

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It is a mystery how such a sheer height and mass of rock can have leapt up from the smooth, flat moor around, with no ridge of hill-side to account for it. The summit of the colossal pile is topped by rocks like the huge, blunt snouts of mammoth-hounds, and I have known the "foreigner" who first sights Hound Tor, when looking its blackest, to turn and flee for sheer terror.

In olden days, packs of "wisht hounds" used to sweep howling over the moor on stormy nights, hiding during the day in the clefts and caves of the tor. Mr. Coombe maintains that his father and mother once heard these spectral hounds, and once was enough. I am by no means sure that even I would care to spend a wild black night alone on Hound Tor.

However, it was not night but noon when I was there yesterday—the noon of May day, such a May day as, surely, never before fell from the blue of heaven. It was a white and gold world, peopled by a riot of rapturous birds—thrushes, blackbirds, cuckoos,—and roofed by an absolutely cloudless sky, across whose stainless surface skimmed the fork-tailed swallows with their gleaming white breasts.

I walked through a land of gorse and black-



thorn, and wherever my dazzled eyes rested was white, gold, blue, blue, gold, white, till the black rocks of Hound Tor reared their heads, only to make the colours doubly vivid by contrast.

As usual, I had lunch with me: chicken sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs, a dainty little apple pasty, crisp lettuce, cheese sandwiches, and strong hot coffee in a Thermos. Oh, how good all food does taste out of doors! And how good it is to be alive! Often I wonder whether many people feel the joy of living as I do. I hope, indeed, that they do. To me, every moment of the twenty-four hours is ecstasy, varied ecstasy. It is ecstasy to wake in the morning, after eight hours of unbroken, dreamless sleep, to stretch out every rested muscle and then rise, eager for movement after rest. All movement is ecstasy. When I walk it is not so much for the joy of being out of doors or of getting to some beloved place, as it is for the rapture of motion—the spring of arched insteps, supple limbs, swaying body, moist skin, and strong, slow heart-beats. And after a ten-mile walk, what joy to change everything, and stretch out in an easy chair, to feel the blood swirling through the uttermost parts and innermost recesses of one's being, with every muscle,

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nerve, and fibre exercised, elastic, and all working in perfect harmony. Never, never to be tired, to resent going to bed, because one needs no rest: yet to find rest all the more sweet because it is not necessity but luxury to lie at ease between the soft sheets, watching the plough of stars drive its invisible furrow in the sky above the ebon hills. Ah, if only all mankind might revel in life as I do! Surely it is, or ought to be, the normal state, the common lot.

And with the joy of living that rose almost to pain, so exquisite was the pleasure, I walked straight into death.

It was one of those curious happenings which occur on the moor. One may haunt a certain tract of land for years, thinking one knows its every rock and dimple and thread of water, yet some day one stumbles accidentally upon a strange object never before seen.

Yesterday I left the tor, and walked along the road for a time till, near a plantation a little off the roadside, upon a turfy bank, I found the semblance of a rude grave. It was a narrow ridge, raised above the surrounding turf, with irregular stones along its edges, and at the head an upright hunk of granite. I stopped, startled. Going nearer I found that unknown hands had placed upon it a rough

cross of ducky flowers, which lay limp and dying in the sunshine.

I searched, but there was no inscription. Yet it was unmistakably a human grave.

With a sense of tragedy I turned away at last, came home and peppered everyone with questions. Mr. Coombe, whom I met bringing in the cows for milking, knew nothing of it, except that it was known as "J's grave." He could not tell how it was spelt, whether it was just the letter J or the name Jay. He did not know if it were really a grave, or if the resemblance to one had given it a fancy name.

I came in to search maps and guide books, but in vain.

Then I bethought me of Granny Caunter, and sought her out, before changing. She is better with the warmer days, and was downstairs in the queer little old kitchen, seated on the settle beside the red embers where Jenny had been boiling the kettle for tea. The girl seemed unusually down, I noticed, as I entered.

Then my attention was wholly absorbed in questioning her grandmother.

"Yes, miss, it be a grave, sure 'nough," she replied. "J's grave 'tis called. No, I can't tell 'ee how 'tis spelt for I never couldn't spell. Mary Jay was the poor maid's name.

I heard my mother tell of it, when I was a li'l maid. It happened when her was a li'l maid herself. Her could just mind hearing tell of it."

"What? who?" I clamoured.

The old lady looked very solemn.

"'Tis a suicide's grave, miss."

"Not really? I didn't know there was such a thing to be seen in England. Who was it?"

"A poor maid, miss. Her was an orphan 'prentice from the workhouse, 'prenticed to Barracott farm between Manaton and Heatree. One day, when her was quite young, her tooked a rope and went to the barn there on the Manaton road, and hanged herself from a beam. Her was quite dead when the farmer found her."

Something solemn in the old woman's manner, in Jenny's tense attention, and the memory of the desolate grave, all filled me with a rush of pity and foreboding.

"Oh, how too sad! Poor girl! Why did she do it?"

Jenny advanced a step nearer. She was gazing at her grandmother with an expression of amazed horror, but was quite silent.

"Us don't rightly know," replied the old lady slowly, more slowly even than she is

wont to speak. "No one won't ever know more'n what us thinks, you understand."

"And what do you think?" I ventured.

She looked at me sadly from under her lilac sun-bonnet.

"Us reckoned 'twas the same old story, miss—a young man, who wadn't no gude to her, poor maid."

Suddenly Jenny spoke.

"What man was ever any gude to a maid yet?" she exclaimed, with extraordinary emotion. "'Tis all one way with men. They'm cruel, cruel, and so false as hell. They pretend to love all right, at first, but a maid must be what they make her, not what God made her. I reckon they don't love her as she is, but as they think she is. And when she tells out her mind, and disagrees, they throw her off, whether or no."

I stared aghast. Could this white-faced cynic be simple Jenny Caunter? Her face, her words, her whole personality suddenly suggested black depths of experience. Her grandmother literally glared at her.

"Jenny, be you mazed, woman? What do 'ee mean, using such language? What do 'ee know about men? More'n 'ee ought to, it seemeth."

"More'n I ought to," shrieked the girl,

her passion still rising. "Do 'ee need to do more'n watch the first little bye you knoweth? 'Tis the very nature of 'en, from the cradle. They'm always tormenting something weaker'n themselves. Pulling the wings off flies, trying to kill the butterflies, robbing birds' nesties, breaking the eggs, killing the young birds, and 'tis how they go on, all their lives, always spoiling, killing, breaking what can't never be mended again. And when they come to something with a way of its own, and a voice to speak, and sense to understand, 'tis all the same. A maid must go their way, or get her heart broken, I reckon."

Her voice shook as she finished, and she turned away, but not so quickly as to hide the tears. Then she rushed out of the room, banging the door behind her, with a slam that shook the blue cloam hanging on the dresser hooks.

Mrs. Caunter looked at me, speechless.

"Don't be angry, Granny," I pleaded, kneeling down by her chair. "She has some trouble, some bad trouble, or she wouldn't speak like that. And she is a good girl. Don't be hard on her."

"I bain't angry, miss, and God forbid I should ever be hard on my own flesh and blood. But 'tis a shock like. Never knowed Jenny like it afore."



"It's that wretched story," I said, penitently, "I wish I hadn't found the grave or asked you about it. Why should I have stumbled over it to-day, after all these years? Doesn't Jenny know the story? Has she never heard it before?"

"No, fey. Why, I reckon I've forgotten it myself, these forty years and more. It happened more'n a hundred years ago, and not a soul never mentioned it, after my poor mother died. 'Tis strange, miss, sure 'nough, you finding of it to-day. But don't 'ee be upset, now. 'Twadn't your fault, no, nor yet mine. What ever have come to Jenny?"

"I don't believe it's anything more than that she feels tied here," I said soothingly. "You know, she always says it is hard to have to wait here, when she is young. It's hard for you both," I continued, stroking one knotted hand. "You feel it, too. But I am sure it is only that she feels bitter about not having a sweetheart of her own, and so she takes a bitter view of men in general. That often happens with young women. She will be all right when her share of the world comes along."

The old lady wiped her eyes on her spotless apron.

"Thank 'ee, my dear, for they comforting

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words. No, I won't be hard on the poor maid. I was a maid myself once. But 'tis a shock like."

I left her, feeling strangely depressed. Jenny had disappeared and I had not courage to call her.

I walked slowly home, between hedges white with blackthorn, mauve with wild violets. But the glamour of the day was buried in a desolate grave, out on the open moor where never a fellow-creature would be laid beside the poor girl's dishonoured bones.

Young, lonely, an orphan, ignorant, weak : was there never one strong hand to save her from her wretched fate ?

## CHAPTER VII

### THE SECRET MOURNER

THE story of that grave is haunting. Through all the music of growing May, there sobs the minor string. The story is common enough, sordid enough. It is being enacted every day somewhere upon this earth of ours. But its very commonness makes it all the more pitiful, and speaks of the unsolved riddle, the enigma of love, the love of man for woman, of woman for man, the struggle of each for mastery, and one or other victor in the end. Whose was the fault? Did she love him? Did he love her? Was he glad or sorry when he heard of her fearful deed?

How strange it is that this subject of human love never grows stale or old. Other emotions die and become history. This, never. It is as intensely living to-day as it was in the time of Lancelot and Guinevere. A thousand years hence it will be equally alive, and still the dominating power in all

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human affairs. I suppose it is the immortality of love which keeps it for ever young. A thing which is immortal cannot age. And how passing strange it is, too, that each one has to buy his own experience. No story of another's tragedy, no warning by another's fate ever influences the man or woman struggling in the toils. Each thinks that his case will be different from the common run of stories, and when he finds that his is only the ordinary experience of countless others, it is too late.

Why should we mortals find the same old story so enthralling? Partly, I suppose, because we are, after all, only children, and all children prefer the old stories to the new. Partly, too, because this story touches the deepest chords in our own hearts. Whether consciously or not, each knows that this fate may yet possibly be his.

Some days ago, the Dart called me to her side. First one part of my imperious moor calls, then another, and I have to obey each call. Sometimes it is the glamour and gloom of the heights ; at others, the fruitful activity of the depths, the call of the rivers, or the allurements of her ghostly woods. This week, it was both the Dart and the woods. There are many points where one can strike the

Dart, and many ways of reaching each point, but this call was clear and compelling.

I packed my satchel and set off ere noon. It was not long before valley roads and meadow paths were left behind, and I entered the dark jaws of the wood through which the foaming river rushed, mad to meet her end. At times my way was close beside her waters which leapt, chafing, over giant boulders, or swam silent in clear, deep, amber pools. Ash, oak, fir, and sycamore grew thick for miles up and down the hillsides. Then the path would lead me up to a height of a hundred feet and more above the little river, to stand on a sheer cliff up which the trees still scrambled, breathless. Countless dainty streamlets gushed from the rocks and flowed across the winding path. Avenues of ferns lined both banks. Surely of all graceful things in creation, the most graceful is a large fern. Its broad fringed base, its tiny tapered tip, its gradual curve, the crown or circle in which it stands, its way of swaying in the wind : my eyes never find anything to equal it for perfect gracefulness. Ever before my gaze stretched the narrow, moss-covered path edged with the profusion of ferns, and closely guarded by the trees among whose ranks sunshine and shadow played hide and seek,

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though the sunshine had always the worst of the game. Only at rare intervals, where the branches parted, could the hills be seen, but such glimpses were enough to show that they had their mighty arms around me and, in places, I could even see the curves and dimples of their elbows.

Three miles of wood, and then the eager river led me with one final leap past the gray stone bridge, through some thick underwood, and thence into the sunlit splendour of the Dart. After the gloom of the trees, it was dazzling—the broad, deep stream into whose placid bosom the little Webburn flung herself, foaming, sobbing, from her cradle high on the desolate moor. How soon she found peace! How soon the fret of her waters mingled with the big river till not a ripple was left to show the little one's trouble! How quickly her cry was silenced by the low lullaby of the Dart! The trees crowded down to the edge of the water, and at their feet blossomed long vistas of wild hyacinths which, in the shadowy perspective, vanished into a haze of amethyst. Out in mid-stream, the river wore a golden vesture of sunshine with a hem of beryl green where it touched the shadow of the banks. In and out of the shimmering gold jumped happy silver fishes in pursuit of the May flies.



I spent a long, long day watching the wonders of the water, thinking endless thoughts. But next morning the call of the wild possessed me, and I went again to the desolate grave.

It was doubly alluring since I had learnt its history. I sat there for a long time, brooding. The marsh marigolds were still there, lying in two lines to form a cross. But their radiant petals were withering, and the delicate mauve-pink stalks were utterly limp and lifeless. The hollow-stemmed marsh or water plants soon die of thirst, under ordinary conditions.

Though I wondered much whose hand placed the flowers so frequently upon the grave, I had no idea of waiting for the unknown to come and replace the dead blossoms. But she came, for, ere it was time for me to turn homewards, a girl's figure appeared from the dark plantation behind the grave. It was Thirza Endacott, a girl whom I know well. Her father had been a farmer, but he died before his twin daughters were born, and since their mother's death the two girls had lived with their uncle. As she advanced, I remembered that the short cut through the plantation brought her home to within a mile of the grave. By road, it

would have been a four-mile walk, so, to anyone forgetting the bridle-path, Thirza was the last person likely to be responsible for the flowers.

She walked slowly and made a pretty picture against the dark firs, with her brilliant red-gold hair and blue print dress. On seeing me, she coloured with vexation, and I rose to apologise, though, if I had stopped to reflect, I should have known that I had as much right there as she.

"So you are the good fairy who brings the flowers," I began, trying to set her at ease. "Doesn't it seem strange that I never found this sad place till a week ago? That was the first time I had ever been so far along the Heatree road."

"Not many know it," she answered, recovering her self-possession. "Some of the coaches go by here, some days, and you hear the guard call out, 'Jay's grave, ladies and gentlemen,' as they do to each place they pass. But I reckon not one knows whether 'tis really a grave or no."

"That is very likely," I agreed, remembering my fruitless search through maps and guide books. "I even found that old people like Mr. Coombe don't know its history. If it hadn't been for Mrs. Caunter, I shouldn't know it myself."

Thirza knelt down, took up the dead flowers, and replaced them with fresh ones.

"Do you know it?" I asked at last, wondering at her demeanour and her brooding silence.

She looked up with her great brown eyes shadowed by something more than their dark lashes.

"Yes, I know it. 'Twas Granny Caunter told me."

I puzzled over this information. It seemed strange that Mrs. Caunter should have told Thirza and not her own grand-daughter. I knew the girls were friends.

"Jenny didn't know it till a week ago," I said at last. "And Mrs. Caunter told me that she herself had forgotten it for forty years."

Thirza rose, her task finished.

"Her forgets," she said in her soft, sad voice. "Her told me twelve months or more ago, when Jenny was to market one day. I took a great interest in it. Jenny doesn't. That's all. Mother, you see, was living when old Squire Brown took abroad the bank here and found human bones. There was a doctor staying with him at the time and he said they were human bones, and a woman's, so the old Squire had them put back, and something

the shape of a grave made to cover them lest they should be disturbed again. Her never knew the rights of the story, mother didn't. But I thought to ask Granny Caunter, one day, if she could mind."

She stepped off a few paces to throw away the dead flowers, then returned and looked down at the grave again.

"It's very nice of you to put flowers," I said, wondering more and more.

"I be sorry for the poor maid. It may be my end some day, who knows?"

"Thirza!" I exclaimed, aghast.

She raised her head and looked me full in the face.

"Well, miss, us never knows, and I sometimes feel the misery will get past bearing, some day."

"What misery?" I gasped. My thoughts flew to Jenny. Now, here was another girl apparently weighted by some almost unbearable trouble. Were they all mad, or was it Thirza's trouble which weighed on Jenny?

"Haven't you never heard that the women of our family be under a curse?" she asked bitterly. "Us don't know for why, and 'tiddn't the fault of any of us."

"No; I know nothing of the kind. What is it?"

She paused a minute and looked absently at the threatening black snouts of Hound Tor before she replied.

" 'Tis this. When us marries, the husband comes to a violent death within the first year."

"But how do you account for it?" I protested. The thing was too wild, too painful. "Isn't it a chance? Aren't you making too much of it?"

She shook her head.

"Ah no. 'Twas so with grandmother, and with mother. It will be so with we."

She broke off and wrung her hands together with a gesture of such agony that I dared not question further.

"My twin sister Avis—you know her—is going to be married in June or July to Edwin Wilde, the blacksmith. He saith he baint afraid. But how she can take 'en, I don't know. How a maid can love a man and risk his life! Yet, if her loveth him, how can her live without 'en? Oh, how can her?"

Suddenly, she threw herself down, full length on the grave, crushing the flowers against her breast. I could hear the piteous sobs though they were muffled by her hands.

"Thirza, you poor darling, don't," I said, kneeling beside her and forcing her to rise sufficiently to hide her face against my heart.

She clung to me, weeping passionately. "You poor thing! Do I guess right? Do you love someone?"

"Yes. And I dursn't marry him. I'm frit even to say I love him lest harm should come to him. You know him. 'Tis George Coombe."

In a flash, the picture of the thrashing day returned to me, and the memory of the handsome young fellow walking round beside the horses. Then I thought of the father, my first humble friend, and I felt utterly wretched.

"Avis *will* do it," said Thirza, at length rising and drying her wet face. "And us'll see, us'll see. I must go now, miss, for 'tis tea-time and uncle will see I've been fretting. If I try to tell you more, I shall only cry my eyes out. Ask George, or Granny Caunter, any of them. But don't tell them I come here."

And she hurried away back through the plantation.



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE MAN WITH THE IRON MASK

I came home, feeling utterly bewildered. In fact, it was difficult to believe that I was not dreaming. Here, in a remote Dartmoor village, I had found tragedy equal to any in the slums of London. And there were hints of worse to come.

My main idea was to seek out George Coombe without delay. It was, of course, a delicate matter, but I knew he must sorely need sympathy, and, even from my own personal experience, I knew the relief it is to speak out any trouble which is weighing down one's life.

I kept my eyes very wide open as I neared our hamlet, and soon saw him chain-harrowing a meadow. He was alone, with one quiet horse, and this is not work requiring attention, like ploughing.

He greeted me cordially and I plunged at once into the subject.

"George, I have seen Thirza. She was

troubling about the family history, and she told me to ask you or your father or Mrs. Caunter for it. I felt I would rather come to you. Do you mind speaking of it? If so, I shall quite understand."

His bright face darkened.

"Ah no. I don't make no difference. 'Tis no secret. How was her, then?" he asked, pulling up the horse and looking at me wistfully out of his soft blue eyes. He looked so handsome, so clean, so gentle that my heart went out to him.

"I fear she was sad," I replied frankly. "Her sister's coming marriage is upsetting her very much."

He sighed.

"Poor maid! I want to marry her," he said simply.

"So she gave me to understand. But you are afraid."

He looked up sharply, almost angrily.

"No, fey. I baint 'fraid. 'Tis she."

"Well, I feel with her. She daren't risk your life. She seems to feel quite certain that it would be risking it to marry her. If she loves you she will never do that. I feel for her. Don't you?"

He looked down and thought for some time.

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"Yaas," he said at last. "I should feel the same about she, I reckon."

His acquiescence in the curse horrified me.

"I wish you would tell me the story. So far, I have heard nothing but hints, and I can't believe there is anything in it. It can only be some sort of superstition."

"Well, 'tis a mystery. No person can't put top nor tail to 'en," he agreed, starting on the horse again. I turned and walked beside him.

"There seemeth to be bad luck on the women folk of the family—like as if some person had ill-wished them for years agone. 'Tiddn't no odds till they marry, and then the husband is killed afore they keep their first wedding-day."

"But in what way is he killed? And how long has it been going on?"

"It began with Thirza's grandmother. A few months after he was married, the maister didn't come home one evening. And they found 'en lying dead on the high road, four miles from home, with his horse and cart standing beside 'en. 'Twas a lonely road, and towards evening, and the constable found 'en, after he'd a been dead some hours. There wadn't no mark whatever, nothing to show how he'd comed by his death, so they had to

send for doctor 'fore they could move 'en, like. They got blankets, and tried to keep 'en warm by the roadside, but 'twaddn't no good. Doctor comed and said 'twas a broken neck, and then they carried 'en home.

"No person hadn't seen nothing of it. So they thought he must have been standing up in the cart, driving, and lost his balance, and falled backward on his head. But no one ever knew the rights of it. Thirza's mother was born two months later."

He paused and we tramped in silence. I felt a cold shiver go down my back.

"Have 'ee ever seen old Mason Weldon?" he asked at last. "He lives out over the hill near Hexworthy. He be here to-day, seeing father."

"Never. I never go that way. But go on with the story. What about Thirza's mother?"

"Her married the miller's man, and, one forenoon, he never comed home, so they went down to look for 'en to the mill, and he'd been caught in the machinery inside, and crushed to death. No one knew how that happened, either. He knowed the work well. They outside couldn't hear 'en holler, and there 'twas."

He paused. Again I had nothing to say.

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"What does Avis think about it?" I asked at last. "And Edwin Wilde?"

"Her don't like it 'zactly. But her don't think so much 'bout it as what Thirza do. Edwin, he calleth it an old cram and saith if 'tis a curse he can curse back, and he baint going to be neither stopped marrying Avis, nor yet killed afterwards. Us 'll see."

He pulled up again, and turned the horse's head to the meadow gate. It was past milking time.

I went slowly home, reasoning with myself. The two deaths were probably pure coincidence, the most natural of accidents. There seemed to be no history of any curse, no superstitious tradition, in the family. Yet the more I reasoned, the more I found myself infected by their feelings and the angrier grew my own.

The way from the field back home was by a long, narrow lane, between whose high hedges the setting sunshine could not penetrate. When I was about half-way through the narrow cutting, I suddenly saw a figure standing motionless in the middle of the path, a figure so sinister, so horrible that I felt my heart jump like a dying fish, and my breath come with a gasp that almost choked me.

It was a man who blocked my way, a man

with a black mask. He was apparently awaiting me.

For a minute my horrified brain was filled with chaotic memories of burglars, highway-men, and other horrors. I stood still, literally too paralysed with terror to move another step. Moreover, flight would have been useless. He was only a few paces from me. I could see bleared, bloodshot eyes looking at me through the holes of the mask, and the anomaly of white curly hair floating from under the man's peaked cap.

Suddenly it spoke, with the semblance, only the semblance, of a human voice and speech. The words were guttural, hoarse, sibilant—utterly horrible, and absolutely incomprehensible. Then the figure advanced a step towards me and my last remnant of nerve and reason fled.

I gave one wild yell of horror, then turned and ran back to the field seeking George Coombe, who was, I knew, following me home.

I soon sighted him, and saw that he had heard my scream, for he had abandoned the horse and was hurrying towards me. I could not have stopped myself if I had wanted to. But I did not want to. I hurled myself at him with a force which sent him violently



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into the hedge, and then clung to his arm, almost mad with terror.

"Oh, my dear life, Miss Beatrice, whatever be the matter?" he exclaimed, picking himself out of the brambles. "Have 'ee zeed a snake?"

"A snake?" I panted, terrified, furious. "I've seen the most horrible being I ever conceived even in a nightmare. Oh, I shall go mad if it is following!"

I looked round, but the path was empty. Apparently the monstrosity was still lying in ambush.

Brave man though he was, and even in the midst of my distress, I noticed that George was unnerved. I dropped his arm and stepped back a pace.

"Oh, it was awful. How shall we get home?" I almost sobbed.

"But what is it, what have you seen?" persisted my harassed protector.

"A man—a man with a black mask, and white hair and red eyes," I shuddered. "And he spoke——"

I stopped short. Intelligence shone in George's eyes. To my amazement my words evoked relief rather than greater horror.

"But that be old Thomas Weldon, same as I mentioned to 'ee just now," he exclaimed.

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"I reckon he's looking for me. He's been to see father 'bout the lime."

My fear began to give way to anger, though the bewilderment was if anything greater than ever.

"Do you mean to say you know this man and have him about the place and never warned me?" I panted. "Are you all mad, or what does it mean?"

He looked genuinely distressed, then made a mighty effort after coherency.

"Miss Beatrice, I be real sorry, sure 'nough, that you'm so frit. 'Twas silly of me not to have mind on it, to tell 'ee just now, but you asked me about Thirza's mother and I forgot the old man. And us have known 'en from babies and don't take any notice now. But I reckon 'tis a wisht sight for a stranger. Why, 'tis like this. His chin and jaw got shot away when he was a young man, and eyes injured too. 'Tis awful to see his face without the mask. His tongue and a bit of jaw is left, like. But no person couldn't bear to see 'en as he is. 'Tis the only way, the mask—an iron mask, for anything else wears out too quick in this climate."

"How absolutely awful," I gasped, dropping into the hedge. My limbs were shaking till I could no longer stand. "What an

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awful affliction ! How old is he, how did it happen ? ”

George removed his cap and wiped his forehead. Then he looked at me sadly.

“ ’Tis part of the same tale,” he said slowly. “ Old Weldon was in love with Thirza’s grandmother when he was a young man of twenty. But she wouldn’t have nothing to say to ’en, so he tooked a gun and tried to blow his brains out.”

“ O—h ! ” I shuddered, burying my face in my hands.

“ He was awful hurt, sure ’nough, but the doctors saved ’en and so he hath lived ever since. He be over seventy now, I reckon.”

“ Well, all I can say is, I should have finished myself if I had been in his place. What a ghastly punishment ! Fancy a whole life maimed and speechless like that. Poor wretch ! He has had his punishment with a vengeance. What a beast the young woman must have been not to marry him, after that. In her place, I should have married him for sheer pity. And is it supposed that this horrible retribution befell him just for loving her ? ”

“ That’s right,” he said solemnly. “ You see how ’tis. The man who loved her and

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wanted to marry her just got off with his life. The man who married her didn't."

Suddenly, I recalled Thirza's words about fearing even to love George. Then the tragedy, the mystery, the pathos of the whole story, coming on top of the shock, were too much for my self-control, and I burst out crying.

As I sat weeping, I heard George clear his throat nervously a time or two.

"No wonder you believe there is something, some curse," I sobbed. "Oh, you poor things, I am sorry for you all. But where is it? What is the mystery?"

"Us don't know," he answered solemnly. "Wish to God us did. But don't 'ee be 'fraid, miss. Reckon he's gone back, seeing you was timid. He wouldn't hurt a fly, poor old man."

"I'm not afraid," I said, rising unsteadily to my feet. "But I am utterly ashamed of having behaved so badly. Why on earth didn't you warn me? Now I have hurt his feelings fearfully. His affliction is bad enough without being shrieked at and run away from as if he were the very devil. George, do tell him I was nervous before I met him, that I am a natural, anything whatever to soothe him. Fetch the horse and hurry up.

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He may be gone, and someone must explain."

He obeyed and I slunk behind him, half hoping, half fearing to meet the old man again. But he had vanished entirely, so I said good-night at the branching of the ways, and came in to rest.

I lay down for an hour before dinner, for I felt really shaken. But my mind worked furiously all the while.

Jemmy advised me, when writing my moor book, not to trouble about plot. Yet here is a plot with a vengeance—a thing more weird, more sinister than anything I ever met in the worst of the slums.

It is all so unaccountable, so unlikely, so wild even. It seems to me as if a vast, incomprehensible power has suddenly, silently, begun to weave a net round us. It all looks like part of a whole, the beginning of some tragic drama in which we are each forced by an invisible psychic force to play our respective parts. It is so strange that I should not have discovered Jay's grave before this year; so strange that I should never have seen old Weldon, or heard the history of the Endacotts. To be sure, it is Avis's approaching marriage which has revived the old trouble, hitherto buried for years. And

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the mason work of the village is done by the local man, which would account for old Weldon being very rarely here. But there is something, something. If only I could get to the bottom of it and avert the curse, if curse it be !



## CHAPTER IX

### A DARTMOOR SHEEP-SHEARING

**I**T is a huge relief to turn from the contemplation of these past and threatening tragedies to the peaceful routine of farm work. That is, no doubt, its main value for healing the ills of soul and body. One turns from human strife, perhaps even from bloodshed, and there are the placid, orderly animals, the silent, fruitful fields, all working out their allotted destiny, untroubled by the passions that ravage humanity. As housework is to the woman, so is farm work to the man. Half its value lies in the necessity for regularity, and this imperative regularity is due to the fact that it is life which is calling. When you are dealing with living things, you cannot defer your duties till next day. Men must be fed, beds made, fires lighted. Animals also must be fed, and watered, and the cows must be milked. The work of the farm, like the work of the house, cannot be postponed for death, marriage, birth, or any other event, however mighty.

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When I stepped out into the farmyard this morning, there was happy thriving life at every turn. Half a dozen hens were proclaiming their fruitfulness at the pitch of their voices, in that hiccoughing laughter which always makes me laugh with them. Their lord, the great red-gold Buff Orpington "stag," as they call cocks here, was perched on the top bar of one gate, crowing till one's ear-drums felt sore. Is there any creature who can make, for its size, the din that a healthy cock can? A hungry calf is no bad second; a pig whose nose is being ringed can cause the very dogs to flee away. But the noise of a cock surpasses all, both in its volume and persistence.

Three happy white pigs grunted a chorus of contentment in the sheltered little plat near by. One of these pigs loves rain. On a wet day he sings from morning till evening—a song composed of deep, full-bodied grunts, tempered by occasional nasal squeals. It is not musical, but never have I heard any sound so suggestive of the deepest contentment. His brother, on the contrary, loathes rain and, even in a shower, sulkily seeks the shelter of the thatched, open linnhay in the plat. The third pig plays all day with a wire-haired terrier belonging to one of the cottagers.

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As far as its figure will permit, it imitates the dog's movements, and never have I seen such an utter clown. They play for hours on end. Then they succumb to fatigue, lie down, have a nap, and begin again.

As I stood listening, and revelling in the caress of the sun's golden hands upon my bare head, my cuckoo clock struck ten and its voice floated out through open doors and windows to mingle with the voices of the countless cuckoos who were absolutely hysterical with the joy of living. There is a certain time, during every May month, when they cannot contain themselves sufficiently to finish their call. They abandon the last syllable and exclaim "cook, cook, cook" in a crescendo of delight. When you hear many cuckoos calling at the same time, it is quite wonderful to hear their different keys. I used to think their voices were all of the same pitch. Not a bit of it. They have quite four different keys. There are, for instance, two who answer each other, all day, from the east and west side of the valley. One is soprano, the other a deep, rich, velvety contralto. My clock is such a good imitation of its originals that it is not always possible to tell which is which, at the short hours.

We are just now in the thick of shearing,

and I visit the big barn frequently. It is a pretty sight. And, even more than this, you see the men in their most natural state. In the fields they are not all collected in a group as they are for shearing. If you get two or three by the rick, there are another two or three travelling about the field with the cart. No, if you want to study the human element of Dartmoor, take up an unobtrusive position in the shearing barn.

To-day, George Coombe, Jem West, Edwin Wilde, William Wilcox, and John Collins were down on their knees, hard at it. Mr. Coombe hovered round with a pitch-mark and tar-pot. On a bench in a dusky corner reposed Grandfer West, with his grandson Bertie beside him. Old Wilde, Edwin's father, was there also. Ben dog lay apart by the improvised pen of hurdles outside the barn door, where the yet unshorn animals awaited their turn. He was present much as the village constable is present at the annual sports on the green, just to remind any possible law-breakers that there is still such a thing as discipline. One sturdy lamb, with a long, woolly tail, was egging Ben on to fight. It kept approaching him, butting him with its head and then receding backwards with an expression which clearly conveyed its

## A DARTMOOR SHEEP-SHEARING 121

contempt for a dog that will take a smack in the face without retaliation. Ben was obviously embarrassed by the situation. No dignified, elderly sheep-dog could possibly take the least notice of a March lamb. So each time the curly little head challenged him he turned his own aside, and received the impact on his cheek. After a bit, the lamb got tired of the one-sided fight and returned to its dam, "dame" as Mr. Coombe always calls them. He insists that "dame" is the original word and that corrupt man has shortened it, partly for purposes of lawful expletive.

Grandfer West takes a gloomy view of life, a gloomier view than the old generation usually takes of the younger. Old Wilde, on the contrary, is a jolly old dog who is never willingly sober. He mends roads perfunctorily, when funds are too low to permit of his spending all day in the inn. But correctly speaking, he is kept by his son, the blacksmith, and by a severely respectable wife who takes in washing. He and Grandfer West were at it, tooth and nail, when I joined the throng.

There was a general "Good-morning, m'm," and then, as usual, they resumed their discourse, in which, however, Granfer West took no further part.

"In my young days, I helped to build London Bridge, and that's more than any of they youngsters can say," Old Wilde was remarking with a twinkle. He had obviously enjoyed some mugs of cider already and was in his happiest mood. Cider flows lavishly at shearing time. It is the sickliest work the men ever have to do, frequently causing biliousness, and they need much drink. The stooping position, the strong rank odour of the sheep, the warm oily yellow "yoke" from the fleeces, the inhaling of the animal's breath which in some positions cannot be avoided, all require a very stout stomach, and some shearers eat practically no solid food for a week.

"Yes, fey, I helped to build London Bridge," repeated Wilde senior.

"Reckon you'm a big liard," mildly suggested Collins, the thatcher. He is as good a shearer as he is a thatcher and drinks like a fish. There may be sober thatchers. If so, we cannot find them on Dartmoor. The other day, our head tenant recommended one because he had only had D.T. three times.

"You unt never been to London in your life," he added, pausing to whisk his animal over for skilful operations on the great ruff round its throat.



## A DARTMOOR SHEEP-SHEARING 123

Old Wilde chuckled hoarsely. To be called a liar he took rather as a compliment than otherwise. He was not one, and knew it, and knew that everyone there knew it. If the accusation had been true, the barn would not have held him.

"I baint ever bin to Lonnon and don't never mean to go, neither," he agreed. "But I helped build the bridge for all that."

"'Tis clear you'm not a Graystone man, John Collins," broke in young Wilde scornfully. "Haven't 'ee ever yeerd tell of the time when they fetched the stone from Bonehill foredown and Hamildown to send away to London by Canal from Bovey? And where's your eyes, man, if you haven't ever seen the marks of the ancient tramway from Hey Tor rocks where they runned 'en down to Bovey from the carts?"

Collins collapsed, and the old man complacently took up the tale again.

"Ah, us used to be out by four in the morning with the carts and cleaving the stones afore you young men 'ud be out o' bed nowadays," he resumed. "Then, after us had scat 'en abroad, us 'ud load the carts or runners and off to Hey Tor to the tram."

"Twaddn't such hard work as farming," interposed Grandfer West. "Ah, I can mind

the days when bread was a shilling a loaf, and when I drove the last of my sheep to be sold because I couldn't afford to keep 'em."

A sympathetic silence followed this bit of ancient history.

"'Twas easier then for the farmers than wot 'tis now, in some ways," chuckled old Wilde. "They days, you got your byes and maids for nothing and worked 'en day and night, when you'd a mind to. Or I reckon you was even paid for larning of 'en. There was a brave lot to be said for the old 'prentice days. Now 'tis t'other way. Maisters have got to pay 'en for the honour of larning of 'en; and where the rights of that be, I never can tell."

"No, nor me neither," acquiesced Mr. Coombe, more heatedly than I had ever heard him speak. "Wot with the damage they do, and the aggravation of their forgetfulness, 'tis they ought to pay us for putting up with 'en. Would 'ee believe that, th' other day I sent that bye of mine to Great Meader for the harrow, and though he know'd I'd a got two ewes there yearning, he never had mind to look at they. Didn't know if they was alive or dead when he comed back."

Old Wilde expectorated expressively. Without a word, he conveyed sympathy for Mr. Coombe and contempt for the "bye."

Willcox, the man in question, listened to the complaint as calmly as if he were not even remotely concerned. He has a placid, good-tempered face, with eyes as soft and brown as a sheep-dog's. No man has ever seen him out of temper or inside a public house.

" 'Tis hard work, farming," he remarked after a pause, but with a smile which belied his words. " 'Tain't surprising that some goeth to Canada. Here 'tis often only five shillings a week or so, winter time, when the weather hinders work. And no regular hours any time o' the year. 'Tis the more you do, the more you may do, and no extra pay, half the time. And nine months in the year a man hasn't a dry shirt to his back with the rain, and t'other three months 'tis wet with the sweat. And never any chance of rising or saving to get a farm of his own. 'Tis matter enough to scrape a few pounds together for getting married. There's a lot to be said for emigration, I reckon."

At this point, young Wilde suddenly rose and left the barn with more speed than grace. A few minutes later there rose on the air sounds as if a fellow creature were being violently and shamelessly indisposed. A roar of laughter rang through the barn.

" Reckon he'd best go back to the forge,"

roared Collins. "The yoke be too rich for his poor belly. He baint used to 'en."

In a few minutes Wilde re-appeared, to be greeted with volleys of chaff, which he ignored. As he was making his way back to his half-finished animal, Bertie suddenly jumped from his seat and proffered him a pink pint-mug of cider.

"Reckon I know what 'tis to urge, myself, sometimes," remarked the small sage, listening to the mellow gurglings of the fluid as it flowed down Wilde's throat.

Grandfer West muttered something unflattering about the impertinence of small boys.

"Was that there mug alongside of 'ee all the time?" he demanded sharply.

"Yaas," replied his grandson composedly, "behind my jacket. I knowed if you or Mr. Wilde seed 'en, there wouldn't have been no chance for any other man who's working and earning it."

Old Wilde chuckled again and thumped his stick on the ground.

"True for 'ee, me bye," he acquiesced. Jem West looked up from his shearing and cast his usual helpless glance at his son as Grandfer left the barn in a tantrum.

The day wore on. Many rich fleeces were carefully folded, to be stored in the tallat till

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wool should be at the highest possible price. Some of them weighed fourteen pounds and came away practically whole. The shorn sheep looked strikingly insignificant and youthful without their huge coats, and their clipped wool shone like silk in the sunlight, making a semi-transparent veil over their delicate pink skins.

The end of the business was the stamping of each beast with its owner's initials by means of the pitch-mark dipped in warm tar.

Then they were turned back on to the moor, where they are now dotting the greening hill-sides like the whitest of great pearls among the springing bracken.

"Reckon us'll have some strange bed-mates to-night," said young Wilde, openly scratching his head. "Have you got any ticks, George?"

"Yes, I reckon," acquiesced George placidly, though with a twinkle at me. Once and once only have I seen the huge black crab-like reptile which infests the fleeces of sheep and goes by the name of "tick," and my horror was such that it is a perennial joke at shearing time.

At last the men filed out, stretching weary backs with gladness.

I watched them go, George Coombe and

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Edwin Wilde together, and the man in the iron mask ; the sinister fate which had befallen three men and the possible danger overhanging the two then before me, all seemed as unreal as a hideous nightmare when one awakens to find the sunshine streaming into one's room.



## CHAPTER X

### THE GATHERING OF THE HAY

**A**VIS ENDACOTT was married the last week in May. It was a modest, pretty little wedding and the young pair went straight to their cottage home four miles out on the moor. Wilde has given up the forge work to a younger brother and has taken a place as trapper, to which post attaches a cottage.

On my way home from church, I visited Granny Caunter, who was ailing. I found her weak and languid. Jenny's demeanour was most distressing. Her usually pale face was deadly white, while her eyes glowed with a sudden fire that was half defiance and half despair. I tried to cheat myself into thinking that perhaps it was sympathy for a girl friend over whom hung a possible tragedy. But my woman's instinct was too honest to be deluded. Without reason, without proof, I felt convinced that there was something wrong between her and Wilde.

Jenny's furious outburst against men, together with her manner on the wedding-day, were sadly suspicious, especially as she made an excuse not to attend the church, thereby greatly surprising her grandmother.

But it is now June. Queen May is dead and many of her maids-of-honour have died with her. The hedge tops are no longer mauve with wild hyacinths, and the rich bronze of the sycamore buds has paled into green. The marsh marigold has ceased to kindle her golden fires in the swamps, and the lilac and apple-blossom have vanished from the trees in front of the queer old porch. Blackthorn and gorse are over too, but May has left us her wealth of whitethorn, which lies like thick snowdrifts on the branches beneath whose fragrant shelter wave the pink campian and white stellaria. Faithful campian ! She is one of the first to come and the last to go ; her vivid rose-pink blossoms beautify every hedge for months together.

My mind is like a photographic plate on which many views have been thrown. At the bottom there is the tragedy, but many scenes of thriving life, of placid contentment, of a sun-kissed moor awakening to her full summer splendour have blurred and almost obliterated the dark picture underneath them.

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No trace of the moor's seal-brown robe is left. She is now at her very greenest, clothed in dainty, frilled, ruffled robes of young bracken whose sensitive hands are expanding daily in the June sunshine. Bracken is cautious. All the fern family is. Perhaps bracken is the most careful because of the exposed heights on which it grows. There is no budding of tender green to get nipped. Instead, it first thrusts a small clenched fist defiantly through the turf and not a digit opens till it is sure of the weather. The tightly closed fist remains closed for a week or even longer, before it begins to open even one tentative finger. By mid-June, the graceful hands are spread wide and increasing beyond all likeness of their first estate, though a slight blow will still snap the tender wrist which sheds its scented sap of green life-blood. Bruised bracken has a delicious odour, and wherever the sheep, ponies, and cattle tread, the moor is fragrant with it.

Now the commencement of hay is alluring us all. There are few merrier days in the year than that morning in the very heart of summer, when the whole tide of farm life sets to the first clover hay-field.

In these decadent days, we use machines for hay-cutting, and judging by the adverse

criticism of Grandfer West and old Wilde, all forms of harvesting are much less picturesque than they were "for years ago," when a row of mowers swept the fields with scythes.

Certainly it is less pleasing to the ear, the harsh whirring of the great knife, compared with the swish of many scythes and the quick throb of the whetstone.

But the modern farmer has not a grain of sentiment in his nature. If he can, in half a day, single-handed, cut a field of grass which formerly required six men for two days, why, he does it, and jeers callously at the sentimental regrets of his grandsire.

We all make the most of hay harvest. It has not that touch of stately melancholy inseparable from the corn harvest. At hay time summer is young and all her heat and fruitfulness are ahead, not behind. July is yet to come, July the longest, hottest month of all the Dartmoor year, and after her, August robed in kingly purple, and September in the richest yellow-gold.

Jem West drove the machine this morning, and a hilarious mob followed closely up over the short stretch of moor to Ladymead, who was clothed in her old-rose robe of clover, gemmed with ox-eye daisies. It was a goodly

sight, that field. The clover stood, in a solid mass, as high as my heart, without one bare or bowed patch in the whole four acres. Dogs and children at once disported themselves along the flower-starred hedges, but the men had serious work by the gateway, where they oiled the machine, tried various nuts, and sharpened and set in the huge knife ready for its work of execution. It is tedious, waiting for the machine to get under way, but it does so, at last, of course, and with a series of "Wuggas," "Steady, steady," "Now then, Violet," they set forth along the outside edge of the clover, as close to the hedge as a skilful driver dares to go, and the first swathes fall, more fragrant in death even than in life.

To-day, Willcox was the man to go round behind the cutter, keeping the knife clear with a prang. Old men, dogs, children, and I reposed in a shady hedge, watching.

"Quick work," murmured Grandfer West. "Life be easy now, I reckon, for the farmer, to what it was when I was young."

"You'm always saying that," interposed old Wilde. "Any person would think you was a martyr at the stake all your young days, the way you talk. Reckon you'd a got things in your favour that they youngsters ain't got now—'prentices for one."

At this word, my thoughts leapt to the desolate grave on the moor above us, and I interrupted with a thought that had been recurring to me since I heard the story.

"I can't make out," I began, "why they used to bury suicides at cross roads, and now in the churchyard. If they may be buried now in consecrated ground, why weren't they then? There has been no difference in the ecclesiastical law, but there is a difference somewhere. What is it?"

Grandfer West looked at me vaguely out of his dim old eyes. Wilde got up, stumped along the hedge to where an army of bottles and stone jugs was standing in the shade, drank the entire contents of a quart bottle without the least attempt at concealment, and returned to us, plainly much refreshed.

"Why, miss," he replied, flopping into the hedge again. "'tis like this. For years ago, suicide was suicide; now it's temporary insanity."

I stared. He was not trying to be smart. He was unconscious of irony. He had merely stated, in one crisp sentence, the past and present attitude of the public mind to the saddest of human tragedies.

I sat, buried in thought, till a diversion was made by the appearance of two more tiny



tenants who tottered into the field on small, unsteady feet which supported the usual bow legs. Till we grew used to it, the bow legs of Dartmoor children filled us with concern. They are all alike, in a greater or lesser degree. All are splendidly fine, heavy babies, much too heavy for the ordinary infantile leg power, and the entire absence of lime in the moorland soil renders the bone structures very soft at the beginning of life.

These are the two causes of such bow legs as one never sees in cities even among the most "rickety" children. I have seen here children whose very feet were turned over or under them, and whose hips and backs were quite thrown out of balance. And the local remedy is one that would give the average city doctor fits. Instead of irons and splints and bandages and rest, these children are cured by—walking. It sounds incredible, but it is true. At the age of two a child will walk several miles, and the more it walks, the straighter do its legs get. By four years, and often earlier, there is not a trace of bow to be seen. The parental theory is that as the muscles develop with walking, they pull the bones back into place. In theory, this is common sense ; in practice, the result is a perfect cure in every case.

Walking is the cure for most ills, so they say here. And what walking will not cure, work will, in some form or other. They are a plucky race. For most misfortunes there is a jest. For the remainder, placid resignation and the old formula, "Us can't go against it."

The tiny creatures found themselves a seat upon a friendly boulder by the bank, but they were soon joined by Bertie and Betty, who lured them into the open to play at rabbits among the newly-cut grass. The escape of real, live, and much terrified rabbits at intervals from the still standing grass lent a zest to the game, and the dogs also had their sport in chivvying their fleet, furry prey to the hedges. I rejoice to say that, as usual, the rabbits had the best of it, and not one was caught.

"For years ago," resumed Grandfer West after a prolonged silence, "us used to work with oxen. Many and many an acre I've ploughed with they."

"What were they like?" I asked. "I have heard of it but never seen it."

"Just the same as the bullocks be now. Us had 'en shod on the two off-claws. But a bullock's shoe was different to a horse's, and went by a different name, same as its hoofs

did. Claw, us called the feet of 'en, and 'coo' was the shoe. T'other day, Mr. Coombe ploughed up an oxen's coo that must have been there forty years, I reckon. He's kept it, for there isn't another in the parish that I know by. No, us didn't use no bits nor bridles—just goads to prod with. The young ones was broken in by being yoked with the old ones. Some time back, at a sale, an old bullock yoke was among the rummage and not a young man there knew what 'twas for."

"Good thing, too," remarked old Wilde, obviously for the sake of opposition. "'Twas a cruel thing, they goads. And you had to throw the poor beasts to shoe 'en."

"Twaddn't half so cruel as a bit, if you come to that," snapped Grandfer West. "A good driver didn't need to use the goad. He did it by words, not blows. My oxen knew the words so well as I did: 'Yu nither,' 'War off,' and th' others. 'Tis a pity when fules yap 'bout what they don't rightly understand."

Wilde laughed indulgently. He always treated his opponent's remarks as one would those of a fractious child.

"Ben be getting up in years," he remarked, as the dog threw himself down in the shade,

panting and tired out with his rabbit chasing. "Ah well, neither dog nor man can have two noons in one day."

I looked at Ben sadly. It is true that he has aged lately, and the quaint old proverb always brings with it a touch of melancholy.

These old sayings, whether grave or gay, are fascinating. I do not mean the stereotyped phrases one may get in Dartmoor guide books, but the homely, everyday things in constant use. To one thrifty housewife I am indebted for the phrase "larrups of rags." "Her comed home in larrups of rags." Another says, "'Twas torn all to flitters." What two sentences could better convey a hopelessly ragged condition? Another homely phrase used about quarrels by the would-be peacemaker is: "Never mind 'en. 'Twill all rub out when 'tis dry"—a shrewd and metaphorical truth which has comforted me before now. Another phrase used to make light of fault-finding is, "Don't fret 'bout what you say. I've lived too long by the woods to be frit by the owls."

More than once I have been besought not to trust someone or other "no further 'n you can throw a horse by the tail." And a scathing commentary on the proverb, "Make hay while the sun shines" is the retort, "Any fule

can make hay while the sun shines. Give me the man who can make hay while it rains." "Silence is the best noise" is a witty shot at gossips, and "God pays debts without money" is used as a suggestive reproof to evil-doers.

Yes, it is a happy time, hay harvest, with its long, gold days and its short, silver nights.

The moon is nearly full just now, and I visited the deserted field as late as half-past ten, for sheer inability to waste the wonderful hours in bed.

The sloping acres lay absolutely silent, their rich swathes bathed in dew and shining like silver in the soft light. The dusky moor kept guard on every side, and the stars stooped low on the south horizon to crown her with their glittering diadem.

As I stood, the whole world seemed to be steeped in peace. Yet, unknown to any human being, a man was, even then, writhing out his life on the moor actually in sight of his home, where his wife sat awaiting him by the hearth, on which his supper was warm in the camp kettle.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE TRAGEDY ON THE COMMONS

THE next day was as perfect as its predecessor, and, being Sunday, the beauty was augmented by the real Sabbath peace that you find now in few places. We have no Sunday post in Graystone, and even the farm animals seem to share in the lazy calm. I was lying in a deck chair, staring up at the crimson glory of a rambler rose against the cloudless sky. My every nerve was thrilling with the joy of life. Only one more drop was needed for my cup of perfect contentment, and that was the music of the bells from the distant village.

But it came not. Instead, a voice floated to my shrinking ears from a figure at the gate.

"Oh, I thought you would be glad to hear, miss, that the man is dead right enough."

I jumped clean out of my chair with one startled leap.

"What on earth do you mean?" I demanded, facing the pallid visage of Grandfer



West. "Which man is dead, and how dare you say that I should be glad to hear of any one's death, even my worst enemy's, on such a morning as this?"

The old man quailed at my fury.

"Beg pardon, miss. I didn't mean no harm. 'Tis only my manner of speaking. All I meant was, everyone be anxious for news, and I thought you'd a like to know the truth."

"What is it? What do you mean?"

He stared at me, amazed.

"Haven't 'ee yeard then? Didn't 'ee notice the bells baint ringing? 'Tis young Wilde. He never went home last night, and they've a found 'en dead 'pon the commons."

The shock was such that I had to cling to the gate.

"Oh, you don't mean it! Already? Poor, poor Avis! How did it happen? What does it all mean?"

Grandfer West shook his head.

"Lord Almighty knoweth," he said solemnly. "Us don't. Wish us did. Us don't know no rights of it yet awhile. 'Twas Willcox found 'en. He was up commons after a colt, then, and seed a man lying. Went over to 'en, and there was Wilde, bin bleeding streams, and mouth and eyes wide

open, dead. 'Tis a gashly old wound in the neck of 'en, and Willcox reckons 'tis murder. The ringers have gone up along to help get 'en home."

I staggered back to my chair, deadly sick. The whole thing was too horrible for endurance. I wiped my wet forehead with clammy hands and sat trembling in the sunshine.

Grandfer West began to awaken to the havoc he had made.

"I be some sorry, miss, if you'm upset," he began apologetically. "But I made sure you'd have yeerd and would be anxious."

"Never mind," I said, wondering vaguely why my voice sounded to be a long way off. "I should have heard from someone, of course. It doesn't much matter when. But I do want to know more. Is James going up? Is the policeman there?"

"Yes, fey. They fetched he to once, and he sent off for doctor. James be gwain over to town for latest news now directly."

"Ask him to let me know if he hears anything fresh, and ask him to tell the policeman to come this way home, as soon as he is free," I commanded. "It's no place for women, except for poor Avis's sake. I would go to her, gladly, but she will have her own people, and I shouldn't dare to intrude

yet. Have you heard anything about her yet ? ”

“ Yes, worse luck. Poor sowl, her comed up, just after Willcox, and seed the body just as ’twas. Her’d been seeking him for hours. Willcox said her gived one awful screech, like, and then turned to stone, seemingly. Her never spoke again, nor cried, nor nothing—just dropped down and sat by ’en, like stone.”

“ Poor girl, poor girl ! It’s too awful. Do ask James to send Harvey as soon as he is free.”

The old man hobbled off, and I sank back in my chair, shaking. The stories of each previous victim returned to me with horrid clearness. It is twenty years since the last death. Yet the mystery, the curse, the evil fate still dogs its prey. The thing is happening now, in our own day. What can it possibly be ? Surely not murder. That theory is too fantastic. No one living person could survive long enough to murder three generations of men, and the compulsion to kill could not surely be handed down from father to son in some one family. Yet each death has been mysterious, especially that of the man found with his neck broken. What can it be, this awful thing whose victim never escapes ?

I expected to wait many hours for Constable Harvey, but to my amazed relief he appeared before lunch-time, to find me still sitting, dazed, in the garden. He is a handsome fellow, and the sight of his placid face, neat uniform, and helmet gave me a sense of relief. He saluted in his usual orderly manner, and waited for me to speak.

"Come in and sit down, Harvey," I said, rising to lead the way into the dining-room. "You must be tired and bothered with this awful business, aren't you?"

He removed his helmet, wiped his beaded forehead, and dropped, thankfully, into a chair.

"Well, m'm, I am, a bit," he confessed. "But discipline is discipline and it doesn't do for the police to give way. It's bad enough as it is."

"Were they awfully cut up? Who was there? What is it? Can you account for it?"

He shook his head.

"I never seen such a thing before and I never want to again," he said slowly. "I couldn't 'low the body to be shifted till doctor and sergeant arrived, and half the parish was there, I reckon, and it was a hard job to keep order at all. Never saw men so

upset. I was forced to keep 'en back for a certain distance around because of searching for clues. I made sure 'twas murder. We all did, to begin with."

"Surely it can't be," I protested faintly.

"No, m'm, I think it's accounted for now. But you see, there he was, stone dead, with his head half cut off, the right side of his neck. 'Twas a wound he couldn't have done hisself. We made sure someone must ha' done it, you see. Well, doctor came and he said he'd been dead nearly twelve hours, and that he must have died in six minutes. All the arteries in the neck was cut. He said if the whole College of Surgeons had been there, they couldn't have saved 'en. Well, then we searched, and quite sixty yards from the body we found a scythe."

"A scythe!"

"Yes. It seems he'd taken down Farmer Beare's scythe to be sharpened, and was riding home with it over his shoulder. That much be true, for Carpenter French met him at ten o'clock in the village and told him he must be mad to do such a foolish thing. 'Tis clean against regulations. If I'd met him, I could have summoned him for it. They'm obliged to carry a scythe swathed around with hay or straw bands, a bill hook

the same, and a prang must be corked, even for walking on the high-roads with them. But as for riding hackney——”

He paused and shook his head. Words failed him.

“What an utter fool,” I almost sobbed. “He might at least have thought of his wife. Go on.”

“Well, m’m, he was a rough-rider, Edwin was. Rode more like a wild Indian than a white man. He had a drop of drink, too, and it was moonlight, and us-reckon he was tearing and galloping over the commons track, and the pony tripped and threw him on his right side where the edge of the scythe would have caught his neck. You see, if ’twas that he was thrown, ’twould ha’ been a tremendous blow from the scythe.”

“But how did it get into a gorse bush, and why was it sixty yards from him?”

“No person can’t tell ’xactly. The rights of it won’t never be known. We reckon that the bush was where he falled first, and the scythe was left there, and he was dragged by the stirrup and got free further on. Or else he managed to walk a bit before he lost consciousness. That’s the only top or tail we can make of it.”

“Will there be an inquest? But of course



there must be. How stupid I am! When is it to be?"

"Tuesday. The verdict will be accidental death, right enough, and no more won't never be known. 'Tis a bad job for the poor girl."

After his departure, I felt slightly comforted and steadied. It was perfectly clear that there had been no foul play, and equally clear that the accident was due to gross carelessness. Yet this made it none the less terrible for Avis. Moreover, it seemed such a fearful fate simply for a piece of thoughtlessness. Without doubt, many men rode under similar conditions. Probably he himself had done so frequently. Why so fell a vengeance?

My thoughts went as often to poor Thirza as they did to Avis. For the new young widow, destiny had done her worst. Thirza's fate still loomed over her, black and mysterious. I shuddered to think what the girl must be feeling. She was troubled enough, even before the wedding. But I thought it kindest not to visit either of them till after the inquest, and for my own sake I was glad to have two quiet days in which to gather strength before facing the sorrow which I knew must meet me on several sides.

Harvey came again on Tuesday evening to report. The verdict had been "accidental

death," as anticipated. Poor Avis had had to appear and she was still like one in a dream, never crying or speaking unless forced to. She gave evidence that she sat up till two o'clock for Edwin and then went to bed thinking he had remained at home in the village for the night. He had been a long distance on business and it was just possible, though highly improbable, that he had been detained very late and decided against doing the last four miles. But in the morning she found his pony standing outside the cottage door, saddled and bridled. This told her at once that there had been an accident, and she set out to search, taking the dog with her. Her piteous little story was the only fresh evidence.

On Wednesday morning I visited Granny Caunter. The shock had upset her very much, I had been told, and she had kept to her bed since Sunday. I was taken up by Jenny, who looked ghastly. Granny was not fit to talk for long, though she was touchingly glad to see me and begged me to call again soon. She shook her head silently over the whole business, and all I could extract from her was an opinion that there was something more behind it.

When I said good-bye to her, I nerved

myself to speak to Jenny. It was the first opportunity I had had of seeing her alone. I felt instinctively that the girl was in sore trouble and utterly alone.

I found her in the kitchen, neatly dressed, and her smooth black hair tidily done without a trace of curling-pins past or present. As I appeared, I thought a gleam of relief flickered over her white face, and, at any rate, she offered me a chair.

I began by speaking of her grandmother. For the first time she showed real feeling on that subject and asked me anxiously if I thought the old lady seemed to be failing.

Then I boldly led the talk to the tragedy by asking if she had yet seen her friend Avis.

She said no, and her manner hardened instantly.

"Nor have I," I went on. "I simply don't know how to face her, or Thirza either. It's too awful."

"So 'tis, for they," she agreed, in a smothered tone. "But it served he right. I laughed out loud when I heard of it. I reckon there be a God after all."

I recoiled before her words and manner. She looked actually murderous, and for one mad moment I wondered if she had been the cause of the so-called accident.

"You'm shocked, of course," she went on jeeringly. "Ah, Miss Beatrice, you good young ladies don't know what men be, as I know. That man promised me marriage, fair and straight, and axed me not to tell a soul for fear of upsetting Granny, as we couldn't be married this long while. I felt the same myself about that, for I couldn't see any hope for the future whatever while Granny lived. There idn't a soul else to mind her, and if I were to marry and have a little one, where would Granny be? So I 'greed, and we were tokened a long time—months. And he got my savings out of me—every penny of 'en, saying 'twas for to pay a debt which he was feared his father would come to know. And next thing I heard, he had proposed marriage to Avis and the banns was up, and he bought the furniture out o' my money."

Here she broke off, and rocked herself to and fro on her chair.

"I could ha' told Avis, but I wouldn't," she resumed, still in the hoarse, smothered voice which was too low for her grandmother to hear. "If her loved 'en, 'twas her look-out. If her couldn't see through 'en, 'twasn't my place to show her. Her wouldn't a believed me. Her would have thought it

jealousy, like. I waddn't going to shout out to the parish the way he'd a jilted I, and I knew he wouldn't never tell, for the sake of his own ugly skin. And I'll tell 'ee this, Miss Beatrice," she added, glaring at me out of her bloodshot eyes. "I'll tell the whole truth while I be telling any, and I trust you never to tell it. I can trust 'ee or I shouldn't tell you. But I hoped if he married Avis that the curse would catch 'en. I could see he was going headlong to destruction, and I prayed he might. There be a just God. I b'leeve it now. 'Twas a cruel sin for him to marry Avis, and that very thing, the marriage, was what finished 'en. God Almighty is just. And I reckon he thought on me, as he lay bleeding to death on commons."

## CHAPTER XII

### AN OATH AND A RENUNCIATION

**W**HAT the last two days have been it is almost impossible to describe.

At the moment I can only see one consolation in the whole awful business, which is that never, in a long life, could we possibly go through a similar experience.

On Wednesday there was Jenny's outburst. That left my feelings in a state of chaos. I have had to admit to myself that I am both repelled and attracted by the girl's sentiments. At first their pure savagery appalled me. Next, through this darkness, dawned one thin thread of light in a sense of relief at the punishment measured out. Try as I may to quench the light, I cannot blind myself to the artistic nature of the revenge dealt out by some unseen and all-powerful hand. It was so swift, so complete.

I have tried to persuade myself that, if the victim had been a different type of man, his fate would have been too intolerably painful :



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it is a grain of comfort to us puny mortals when we find that fate is less cruel than at first appears. There is something of this in my heart. But if I am to be honest, I have to admit that the other is there too. If it be savagery then I, too, am a savage underneath the veneer of civilisation.

I was sad enough, troubled enough, on Wednesday. But such a collection of sorrows was packed into yesterday that it is a marvel how one day—even one long July day—could have held them.

In the morning came the funeral. One bell, the tenor, began early to spread its message of death through the golden air to the listening moor and the fruitful fields. I stood out in the garden, watching the roads and tracks through my powerful glasses, and it seemed to me as if every human being in Graystone and for miles around must be flocking to one centre—the graveyard. There there, everywhere, black pigmies dotted the sheer green slopes. And at last, from the direction of threatening Hound Tor, came a thin continuous stream of black. Carts, pedestrians, and horses followed in single file after the coffin. On it crept, the sluggish black current of death, over the white road to the tower whence the bell was

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tolling the death dole—the same bell which, with its five comrades, had six weeks before pealed out the dead man's wedding chime.

I watched and listened till there was nothing more to see or hear, then turned homewards with a shiver. Hot though the sun was, I felt cold, cold, cold.

After lunch I went out to the hay-field. The grass had been turned, raked into long, high swathes, and was then being raised into pooks, preparatory to carrying. Only three men were there when I arrived, West, Willcox, and George Coombe. They were working singly and each at some distance from his neighbour, so I went at once to George, anxious for news of Thirza and to see how he himself was taking the whole awful business. I had not seen him since the accident.

It was a farce either to await or offer the ordinary greetings. I spoke out the first anxiety of my heart, and asked for news of the two poor girls.

He stopped working, rested his prang point downwards on the grass and looked at me. Never have I seen such a change in any face. Except for the sunburn, it was as white and set as stone. A frown furrowed the broad, low forehead, and the merry blue eyes were dark with sorrow. He was dressed entirely in

white: white duck trousers, a white cotton shirt, and the small, finely cut head was covered with a shady white linen hat.

"Can't say, I'm sure. 'Bout so bad as they can be, I reckon. I was to funeral and they was 'xactly like two stone images: not a tear, nor a word. Thirza, her wouldn't so much as look at me. I be gwain to her this evening. I be some worried 'bout the poor maid."

He broke off, snatched his prang and set to work again. But I noticed that, every few minutes, his face turned northwards in the direction of Thirza's home.

"Can't you leave this bothering hay and go at once?" I asked at last. It was too pitiful to see him shackled by duty when he was quivering to fly to his sweetheart.

"Ah no. There's thunder about, and us can't risk four acres of clover hay not if 'twas ever so. Must be all pooked by tea-time."

I sat down on a swathe and thought. Clearly, it never occurred to him for one moment to doubt the girl, to fear that her refusal to notice him meant a lessening of her love. He understood. It was because she loved him so deeply that she had determined no longer to risk his life. Sitting there silent, on the odorous hay, I could see

the labyrinths of Thirza's heart. Then I wondered what the man would have to say.

George soon worked himself away from me. I got up and followed him.

"George, I haven't said yet how intensely I feel for you about this business. In a way, it's worse for you and Thirza than for anyone else. What is it? Oh, I wish we knew. And what can you do? She will make you give her up now."

He struck his prang into the earth with all his force, muttering something which I could not catch. Then he turned to me, threw open his sinewy white arms in a momentary gesture of protest and poured out his love in a torrent of words. It was like the leap of a river bursting its dam at last.

"What can I do? Why, what any man would do if he be a man at all, and that is marry her to once. Do 'ee think I'm such a coward as to be frit of death? Death? I'd go through hell fire for her, face God, man, and devil rather than give her up. Let another man have what's mine? No chance of that though, for her wouldn't never marry anyone but me. Or me not take my own, me leave her alone, let her go down alone to her grave, no wife and no mother, never knowing what a man's true love be, all because I dursn't

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face death for her sake? Her loveth me with all her poor heart. Be I gwain to fail her? Her's mine and I'll take my own in face of God, man, and devil. If I die for it, I die. 'Tis worth the price. I've a counted the cost, and I'm ready to pay it. If I die, her'll have been mine. Us'll be man and wife for life—and after. If I die, my soul 'll bide with her till hers cometh to meet me Naught can part true lovers. Naught can part man and wife, neither death nor nothing else. Once us be man and wife, I don't care a damn for all the curses that ever comed out o' hell. And man and wife we shall be, and that to once."

I listened, awestruck. The hayfield had suddenly become a sanctuary wherein was being offered the life of a man for love. Love, the awful, the immortal, the divine had claimed another victim and he had answered to her call. He had sworn his passionate oath of fealty, had offered his life upon her altar. He had chosen her before life itself and had defied every power of earth, hell, or even heaven to make him false to his oath.

He stood there, with broad fists clenched and every muscle of his supple body tense, as if braced for a leap. He was nothing but a

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humble farmer with generations of lowly, honest, wholesome blood mingling in his veins. But he was a god, a hero, an emperor, nay, that mightiest being in all creation—a man, and a man who had risen to the summit of manhood's perfection, inasmuch as he was ready to lay down his life for his love.

I turned away in silence. Speech would have been an unthinkable sacrilege.

I made my way out of the field, with bent head, thanking God that my unworthy eyes had been permitted to gaze straight into that holy of holies, the heart of a normal man.

As in a dream, I made my way straight to the desolate grave. Reason was entirely subservient to intuition. Virtue had gone out of him into me, and had carried with it a warning. In some indefinable way, I feared for Thirza. I could not analyse the conviction. I did not try to. I had seen the vision of her lover's soul, and I knew she must have seen it too, by the unerring sympathy of love. I knew she must know he would never now relinquish her. And I feared that, somehow, she would find a way to put herself beyond his reach and save him.

I cannot think why the obvious remedy did



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not occur to me. There was only one possible way for Thirza to cut the tangled cord of their destiny, yet this way never took even the shadowiest shape in my mind.

I was conscious only of the formless fear which goaded me to her so as to be near her till her lover should come. The shortest way to her home was by the moor track, past the grave and thence by the bridle-path through the plantation. The heat was intense, but I never paused to rest. In less than two hours, I sighted the desolate grave. As I drew nearer, I saw, with a thrill of horror, that the figure of a woman was lying across it, very still. Then I recognised the gleam of Thirza's red-gold hair. Hot though I was, I broke into a run, still goaded on by instinct alone.

It was like running in a nightmare. I strained every muscle, felt my breath come in great, painful sobs and yet seemed to get no nearer to the motionless figure. Twice I called, but my voice was too hoarse to carry. At last I gained her side, and flung myself down beside her.

She was lying on her back, with upturned face and closed eyes. Her left arm was flung wide from her heart, above which was a dark stain that dyed the breast of her white

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apron. Her right arm lay, limp, across her bosom, and from the clammy fingers a hunter's knife had slipped down on the turf of the grave.

Thirza had found the only way.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE AWAKENING OF THIRZA

**I**N a flash of time, I realised that this was the solution which I had been unconsciously dreading. This was the undefined danger which had drawn me to the poor girl, though apparently too late. I was glad I had not realised it, for anticipation wrings one's nerve and weakens one for the crisis. Arriving with unshaken courage at the time of supreme danger, I assumed, without difficulty, the rôle of saviour.

Gently, but very quickly, I unfastened the girl's clothing, and was thankful to find that the force of the blow had been sustained by a steel in her corsets, from which the knife had glided, almost harmlessly, into her flesh. The wound was bleeding freely, but not dangerously, and I suspected that the unconsciousness was more an ordinary nervous fainting fit than anything like syncope.

I pulled the edges of the wound together, and held them tight, at the same time

shouting for help at the pitch of my voice. And voices carry an incredible distance over the moor, especially on a sultry, still, thunderous day. Quite soon there was an answering shout, and then two farm labourers appeared, crimson with agitation. Shrieks for help in a woman's voice are rare in this country.

I switched my skirt over the knife and fastened the girl's bodice before they came close enough to see any details. The apron I had been obliged to remove entirely in the first instance, and no blood stain could show on the black dress. If possible, I wanted to keep the mournful secret.

"Thirza Endacott has fainted," I began calmly. "She ought not to be left out in this heat, especially with a bare head. Will you kindly fetch that gate from the plantation entrance, and carry her home for me."

They floundered off to the indicated gate as fast as their hob-nailed boots would allow, and, while their backs were turned, I rolled up the knife inside the blood-stained apron, and again tidied up Thirza's dress. The bleeding had almost stopped, and if the movement started it again the wound was not deep enough to cause danger even if allowed to bleed itself out in the course of nature.

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Under my directions, the men lifted her gently on the gate and we started off through the plantation.

Somewhat to my surprise, the girl did not recover consciousness, for which I was thankful. Few people recover from even an ordinary faint with their judgment in full working order, and, knowing the frame of mind she must have been in, I feared that she would betray her secret unawares.

It was an immense relief when we sighted the cottage, but my gratitude was roughly dispersed by a wild figure which tore, bare-headed, down the little garden and almost flung itself upon the unconscious form.

"Oh, Thirza, Thirza! Her's dead, her's dead."

It was Avis, white, trembling, distraught. I seized her by an arm and was about to force her away with more firmness than gentleness, when I saw what made me pause. Her face was working convulsively and, remembering all I had heard about her frozen sorrow, I saw that tears were coming at last to save her reason. So I drew back, leaving her to think the worst, and the men stood stock still, too much alarmed to speak or move. In another minute the tears came in a storm that was both relief and misery to see. I was really

afraid to interfere and yet afraid to let her give way entirely. She knelt with her head on her sister's breast, sobbing till Thirza gave a groan of sympathy, which Avis was too distracted to hear. This goaded me to action. There were two patients on my hands and preference must be given to the one who was in the graver danger.

"Avis," I said, speaking very clearly and calmly, "your sister is not dead. She has fainted and is ill. You must not let her come to and see you in that state or you may do her serious harm. Get up. Stop crying, and help me to put her to bed at once."

I enforced my orders with a firm hand under her arm and she sprang up at once.

"Oh, Miss Beatrice, thank God, thank God," she sobbed, the tears raining down her face, though she made a brave effort to control them. "Are you sure she isn't dead? You are only saying it to comfort me!"

"I am not," I said, giving her a gentle shake. "Look at her eyes. They are tight shut. You never saw a dead person yet with closed eyes, did you?"

She gave another choking sob, then turned towards the house, wiping away her tears with the corner of her apron. I signed to the men, who carried their burden to the door and then,



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laying down the gate, they bore her upstairs and laid her on her bed.

"Now, Avis," I said firmly, thankful at last to be able to treat my patient better. "Get me some cold water and a clean sponge or rag. Then come and help me to undress her. Stop crying. You can cry all night, if you like, after Thirza is attended to."

"Now," I continued, when she returned with a small basin of water, "I have something to tell you which you must be brave to hear. And you must never tell a soul except your uncle. Poor Thirza has been so distracted by your trouble that she has tried to put an end to herself. Look."

I uncovered the wound, which had only bled slightly during the journey through the plantation.

Avis gave a cry and staggered back against the wall. And at that precise moment, Thirza opened her eyes and gazed blankly into mine. This galvanised Avis into comparative composure.

"Lie still, Thirza," I said quietly. "You are safe and will soon be well. I found you on the grave and had you brought home. George will be here soon, and you must think of him."

This announcement had its intended effect.

The colour rushed back to her white cheeks, and, with it, the tears to her eyes.

"Now, Avis, come and cry too," I said composedly, as I sponged away at the wound. "Cry your eyes out, both of you, and then we will have some tea."

To do them both justice, they did their best to obey me. When the blood stopped again, which it soon did, I left them to it, slipped downstairs and began to get tea ready. Luckily, the kettle was almost boiling, so, in ten minutes, I was able to return to Thirza's room with a tray bearing the teapot and some bread and butter.

The moment I entered, Avis flew at me, snatched away the tray, dumped it down on the dressing-table, and then began kissing my hands, my rings, portions of my dress, anything she could catch hold of, as if she would never stop.

With deep relief I saw that poor Thirza's crazy action had been the salvation of her sister. The second shock had thawed the poor little widow's frozen heart, and she had also the only other thing needed—someone dear to her to cosset and coddle.

"You poor child," I said huskily, as I clasped her to me and kissed her repeatedly. "I can't tell you how grieved I am for all the

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trouble. But somehow, somehow, God will work good from it. And now you must take care of Thirza till she is well. She must have nourishment at once. Give her a cup of tea with plenty of milk in it."

Then Thirza stretched out trembling hands from her bed.

"Oh, Miss Beatrice, was it really you that found me?" she sobbed. "And how did 'ee get me home? How many know? And what was I like when you comed along?"

"No one knows except Avis and myself," I answered, sitting gently down on the bed, and taking her hands in mine. "And no one ever will. You are not ill enough at present to have the doctor, and you must get well for George's sake. I was the first to find you, and I covered you up, and hid the knife, so the men know nothing. We shall have to tell George and your uncle and let them scold you as much as they like. But no one outside need ever know."

She wrenched away her hands to cover her guilty face with them.

"Oh, Miss Beatrice, why didn't 'ee let me die? 'Twould have been better for George 'Tis the only way," she moaned.

"Sit up and drink your tea," I said, in matter-of-fact tones. "You will feel more

sensible when you have had some warm nourishment."

Somewhat to my surprise, she obeyed and drained the cup thirstily.

"Give her another, Avis, and make it half milk again. And then have yours and after that give me mine."

The gentle reminder of their duties as hostesses had the desired effect. They both grew composed and began to pour out apologies.

"Us be selfish," said Avis indignantly. "It's been a trying time for you, miss, sure 'nough, and long past your proper tea-time. You must have been upset when you saw Thirza, and I be some sorry I went on so when you got here."

"Never mind," I said cheerfully. "You are both going to be good now, which is all that matters. Thirza, you had better own up and get it over. What made you do such a mad, wicked, cruel thing?"

My patient blushed rose red and then confessed that after the funeral she had been mazed with grief. It was quite clear that her nerve had utterly gone, and her whole mind had been dominated by one thought—how to save George from a similar fate. The idea of suicide had been constantly before her,

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thoughts born from an unwholesome fascination for the orphan girl's desolate grave.

We listened in silence. The story was not long. When it was done, I spoke.

"In future, Thirza, you must think more of others and less of yourself. Did it never occur to you that it would have broken poor George's heart and killed him if you had died by your own hand? No, of course it didn't, you silly girl. And you pretend to love him. I am afraid it is a very poor, weak, second-rate love, after all, compared with his. Put yourself in his place and see what you would have felt about the thing. George loves you well enough to face death for you, yes, even to die rather than give you up, and his feeling is the right one. He will be here soon to tell you about it himself."

She began to cry, this time very softly and almost feebly—the kind of tears that preceded a sleep of exhaustion. The strain and shock she had undergone, the relief of being alive after all, and of knowing that her lover loved her, were too much for any girl's physique: nature was at hand with her own wonderful sedative.

I rose, arranged her pillows, darkened the window, and signed to Avis to come downstairs. She obeyed, and we carried chairs out

into the little porch, there to await George's arrival.

As we sat, she poured out all her own sorrow, and told me in detail of the long watching on the night of the tragedy, the finding of the riderless horse by the gate next morning, and the sight of her dead husband on the moor. Her tears poured down as she told of it, and I cried with her. Even to me, tears were a relief for my own sake. For long, my heart had been aching for these poor girls, and the responsibility of saving Thirza had told on me more than I realised at first.

It was past sunset when George came. The moment he appeared, I saw by his expression that he had heard nothing. Avis slipped away at once and left me to face him alone.

In the fewest possible words I told him the truth. His face grew perfectly white under the sunburn, and his blue eyes darkened with emotion. He stood perfectly silent, with his hat held between his hands, which, unconsciously, twisted it round and round by the brim, as he listened.

"'Twas you that saved her, then," he said at last, in a tone so low that it was almost a whisper. "You comed to her when I couldn't and saved her for me."



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He broke off, and it was just light enough to show the pulse beating in the bare column of his neck.

"No, no. Don't make too much of it," I protested. "It is very unlikely that she would have died, even if no one had found her. She would probably have come to and taken herself home."

He looked at me with such reproach that I felt almost ashamed.

"You know her wouldn't—out bareheaded and bleeding in that fierce sun. And if her'd comed to, her might ha' done the same thing again."

I stood silent, with bent head.

"Miss Beatrice," he went on, his voice shaking till he could scarcely speak, "what can a poor working-man like me say to a lady like you? God in heaven bless you for what you've a done for me and mine to-day. And if ever you have your own day of trouble, please God, I'll have the chance then of serving you with the best I've got to give. You've a made me understand that God is kind. He baint cruel, as I thought. I reckon I was wrong this afternoon, to speak as I did, as if God wanted to take her from me. I know now He don't. He wanted for me to have her, or He wouldn't ha' sent you to

save her. He and you be both on my side and no death nor devil nor curse 'll hurt me now."

His voice died away, choked, and I was too moved to answer. If I had tried to reply, I should have broken down again. There was something utterly grand in his credo, spoken there in the sanctuary of twilight. Day, the blood-stained, was dead. Twilight was come to soothe and heal with her dews of earth and her stars of heaven. It was symbolic of his heart, the heart of a man in which bloody strife was dead, and wherein now reigned the soft darkness of faith, fragrant with the dews of sorrow, gemmed with the stars of hope.

We seemed to stand a long while, silent. Really it could only have been a few minutes. Then he turned to me and asked for Thirza.

"I will go up to see if she is awake," I murmured.

When I entered the room which fronted the west, there was barely light enough left to see my patient's face. As I stooped over her, she uttered a smothered cry and stretched out her arms—though not to me. I turned quickly and found George behind me. He had followed me noiselessly upstairs.

Before I could retreat, he stepped up to the bed, and clasped the girl in his arms, not

violently or hungrily, but with the gentleness of a mother. She raised herself to meet him, and lay nestling against his breast like a child.

Dearly though I would have loved to remain I left them at once. I could easily picture the man's patient tenderness and the woman's tearful prayers for forgiveness.

I found Avis, gave her some directions about Thirza, promised to go over again in the morning, and then sped home, taking the long route by the road. It was too dark for the moor. The waning moon was rising later each night now, and the sky was becoming covered with a pall of cloud.

It was breathlessly still in the valley and very dark. I could see the white riband of the road stretching ahead, and the sombre sheer hills on either hand rearing their mighty bulk against the less sombre sky. I could see stars, here and there, through a rift of cloud. At intervals alongside the road, black fir woods crouched at the feet of the hills. On my right hand flowed a little river whose soft murmur was the only voice of the silent night. Bats fluttered overhead like the ghosts of birds, as black and silent as the moor and the night.

While I walked, my mind was absorbed in the fate of these obscure children of the moor.

I had been profoundly touched by the man's passionate protestation of love in the sunny hayfield, and even more so by his act of faith at the cottage door, under the twilight sky. I could see and feel that this leap in the dark into the arms of God had brought peace to his anguished soul, and it was a peace which had overflowed on me. Through no effort or merit of my own, my nerves were steadied, my mind sufficiently soothed to judge the whole position without prejudice. For the first time I saw that in all the evil there was a gleam of good. The curse, if curse it is, and Wilde's tragic death, have served to develop George till he has attained the summit of manly perfection. Thirza's maddened attempt on her own life has saved her sister's reason by melting the frozen fount of tears. More, it has torn the bandage from her eyes and shown her true love at last, shown her how to rise to the heights of noble womanhood. Even now we can see the glitter of gold in the ugly quartz: each rough-hewn tragedy contains the germ of love. There is no such thing in the world as unmixed evil. May we not hope, nay, must we not hope that love will triumph over all things before the end?

To-day I went again to see Thirza. I found her lying quietly on her pillows, pale

exhausted, but at peace. She sees it all, as clearly as I hoped she would. She understands that she and George must be man and wife for life and after. She is still timid at the thought of fixing a definite date for their marriage, and fearful of beginning any preparations for their future home. This is not to be wondered at, and George, I know, will not press her after the shock she has had. Her love must be allowed to open slowly and naturally without rude forcing. It is everything that she has consented to marry him, and even longs to do so. The lesser things will come in due time.

I returned home by my Dream Tor and lay down at its feet to rest. The thunder had not broken, but it was gathering, and the moor defied the sullen sky with a front still blacker and more sullen.

There was still the unnatural hush, the sense that nature was holding her breath in terror. Even at the height of Dream Tor, not a turf blade moved, nor a leaf of whortleberry. The sky rolled, black and lurid, to the horizon, the crest of every cloud stained with rusty red, and the moor swept forward to close with the sky on the fighting line low in the west. Already, I could hear the hoarse roar of battle, could see an occasional flash

of heaven's artillery through the pitch-black cloud-smoke where sky and moor were clashing in furious conflict.

Yet the storm was many miles away, and the nearer moor rolled from my feet to meet it in long, dark billows that broke into jagged crests of soot-black spray where the tors sprang skyward.

The moor is far more terrible in this black hush than ever she is in the wildest wind. She is like some huge monster crouched to spring whose spring means certain death.

I stood fascinated, transfixed. I could understand the fear of strangers for this moor, named after the mysterious river which feeds yearly on a living heart: this moor, black, silent, desolate, whose bogs lurk concealed as death-traps, whose tors are as raging chaos materialised and petrified. Verily, it is a savage beast to the foreigner, this storm-swept upland crowned by its two hundred towers of mammoth rocks, and hugging to its fierce bosom the river whose legend is unmatched throughout the world. Yet to her lovers she is the queen of all hearts, and even in her fiercest moods we find always the gold of love.

As I stood, again I wondered what is this Thing, black as the sky, silent as the moor,



lurid as the lightning flash, which lurks untired, relentless, generation after generation to dog the members of one moorland race.

What is it which love has to subdue and conquer before the end?

## CHAPTER XIV

### NATURE'S GENTLEFOLK.

**M**ORE than three weeks have slid by and there has been no fresh sorrow to mar their golden beauty. Thirza has recovered from the events of that awful week in mid-July, and Avis is strangely happy, considering her terrible trouble. I think I can guess the cause of her renewed hold on life.

To-day, I have been to see Granny Caunter. She is slowly failing. It is useless to cheat or coax ourselves with false reasons or false hope. The weather and the season are entirely in her favour, yet each week finds her a little more frail. She is gliding painlessly down the golden stream of early autumn.

But she is always bright. It is amazing how unimpaired are her mental faculties. I fancy that the strength and clearness of her mind are due to the lack of what is called "book learning." They say that to learn anything fresh, the mind must first forget something

else. This may be so or may not, but I have always remarked on the clear judgment and retentive memory of anyone who is unable to read.

Granny had again been routing out old relics. To-day, it was a very old charm for stopping hæmorrhage, written in a shakily illiterate hand with no attempt at punctuation. I have borrowed it to copy. Granny says in her young days, and beyond them, it was firmly believed in. Here it is :

Our Saviour Christ was born in Bethlem and baptised  
in the river of Jordan  
the water was vild

And the waters were rude

God spoke these words and the waters stood  
and so shall the blood

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the  
Holy Goost.

I have copied it exactly as it is written, and it was written Granny does not rightly know when, but it was given to her by her mother. The dear old soul regrets, with the sorrowful simplicity of a child, that some person could not have been there to read it over poor Wilde and so save his life, after his accident.

Then she produced a really remarkable treasure—an old, old apprentices' register, dated 1802, and containing the names of 312

youngsters of both sexes who were bound as apprentices between that date and 1840. I peppered her with questions and finally borrowed the shabby old book to study reverently and lengthily at home. Granny's father, it seems, was clerk or overseer to the Guardians of the Poor and this is one of his old registers which, apparently from some oversight was never returned to the workhouse archives.

Considering it in all its aspects, I have never seen a more utterly pathetic volume. Most of the 312 children have the record of at least one living parent. Very few are orphans. Then, against each child's name there is also the name of the master, the witnesses to the deed, the overseer, and an assenting magistrate.

Yet among these hundreds of real persons, not one is left alive. It is indeed a book of the dead.

The oldest apprentice was eighteen, the youngest six. Think of it, you grand-motherly twentieth century ! Seventy years ago children of that tender age were bound to masters, for better for worse, till the age of twenty-one (if they survived) for the sum of fourteen shillings. Body and soul, they were handed over, with fourteen shillings, to some farmer

or yeoman, and heaven alone knows the history of those intervening years until they earned their freedom. We can only hope that the masters were humane, but the grave of one apprentice suicide casts a black shadow on the question.

Some of the children had only a father living, some only a mother. The majority of the masters were yeomen.

There is one tender light upon these sad, dark pages, which is that in the case of each girl-child, the apprenticeship is binding "Until majority, or *marriage*."

Poor little 'prentices! How they must have watched and longed for some bonny lad to woo them and carry them away, proud, free brides, to a humble cottage home. Always we are in the age of chivalry. Modes and types may vary with each century: in one, it is an imprisoned princess rescued by a courtly knight; in another, an orphan 'prentice maid wedded by a moorland yokel. What matter? They are man and woman. Externals, accidentals may vary. Essentials remain for ever unchanged.

Jenny Caunter is an interesting study. Wilde's death has transformed her into an entirely different young woman. She is far too primitive to dissemble. When she dares

to be frank at all, she is unhesitatingly frank. I am, of course, the only creature who knows her trouble so I see her real self in its most undiluted form. In appearance also, no one would know her for the same slut of five months ago. Her dead, dusky black hair is never now disfigured by curling pins or even by artificial curls. It is remarkable hair, especially when left to its natural condition. Black hair is of two kinds, the oily which is coarse and glossy, and the dry which is fine and dusky. One is jèt, the other ebony. Ebony is by far the rarest, and this is Jenny's. It reflects no light whatever—but is, on the contrary, the home of shadow. With her ivory white skin, scarlet lips, and dark blue eyes, she is a remarkable looking young woman. The improvement in her appearance is for Granny's sake and it shows that, somewhere, Jenny keeps a heart, however much she may protest to the contrary. Her loathing and contempt for men entirely contradict every suggestion that she is rendering herself attractive for the sake of the opposite sex. Granny herself sees this and is glad. She understands why the wilful maid is reformed at last in those slatternly habits which have been such a prolonged annoyance.

I frankly confess that Jenny's views on



Man are hideous. All her personal fury has fled. Now she is abstractly scornful. If she were a town product, she would be a militant suffragette. She is unconsciously a participator in the war between the sexes. Anything which suggests man's power or superiority is galling to her. Some day, she may learn that woman is and must for ever be man's superior by the invincible might of motherhood. She is his superior not as a woman but as mother. If she ever has a son of her own, he will teach her that the hand which rocks the cradle rules the world, and that no normal man ever dreams of disputing a sovereignty which reigns, whether actually or virtually, from the unassailable throne of motherhood.

The men of the moor are a fascinating study. They are gentlemen in the truest sense of that beautiful word. In fact, it is a standing puzzle to me where they learn their ways. For instance, no poor, rough farm-labourer ever thinks of trotting past me on horseback. He slows up to pass me at a walk. If he is in a cart, when there is ample room in the road and the horse is only walking, he jumps down and leads it by. And one can do nothing for him in return except to thank him with valueless words. That is

the one drawback to being a woman : we can never repay men for their chivalry. Again, if a man on horseback happens to be standing in the road, talking to a friend, though there may be room for a coach to pass, he wheels his horse round, as one approaches, so as to have its heels tucked against the hedge. It makes no difference whatever whether the men are strangers or friends. If I am walking round the farm with any of the men, they open all gates for me, from small Bertie upwards. Bertie has never once allowed me to open or close a gate for myself, and on one occasion he ran forward to move a wheelbarrow out of the path ahead of me. There was a whole clean grass field to walk on, but I must not be incommoded by stepping aside two paces off the track. Some of the men not only open the gates, but always run forward the last ten yards to do so, in order that I may not have to pause before passing through. On one occasion, we were testing an invalid chair, and the carpenter wished to see it working with someone in it. It was a ramshackle affair, but I offered my services provided he would steady me with a hand. This he was too shy to do, and when I proceeded to tip over, and clutched his arm for support, he reddened up to his forehead.

I rated him soundly for letting me risk a fall, and commanded him to give me a hand without further nonsense. But he begged me to call a maid instead, and entirely declined to lay a finger on me.

They have an exquisite delicacy on this point. Another man had been reading of some suffragettes who had chained themselves to railings and been undone and arrested by the police. This nice fellow begged pardon and asked what must any lady feel like after permitting a policeman's hand to rest upon her? My humble friend could not understand it. He viewed the case from every standpoint, and discussed it with me upon three separate occasions. In fact, he was so eloquent about the degradation of a policeman's touch that I began to fear lest our exemplary village constable might take the thing as a personal matter. My friend found much consolation in the fact that my feelings in the matter were identical with his own. But even then, there were still women, and "born ladies," who did not mind it, who even permitted it, and what was a poor man to think?

The men are just as sweet to women in their own rank of life as they are to me. They fag for them, are ready at any moment, to do

rough, dirty, dangerous work to spare a woman. All workmen clean up after themselves with dustpan and brush, as nattily as any maid. And they help their wives and sisters to any extent. It is quite a common thing for the man of the house to rise first, light the fire and make his wife a cup of tea before breakfast. Some even carry it up to the bedroom. They are always shocked if women go out in very rough weather. Nearly all clean their boots with a yard broom before entering their own homes and not one ever goes upstairs except in his stockinged feet, for fear of making dirt for the women.

On a certain occasion I was present at a tenants' dinner. On one side of me was a gentleman, on the other a working man. And it was the working man who attended to and even anticipated my every want, from the salt onwards.

A rough labourer will open the door for a lady, and collect together her bag, books or whatever she may be carrying.

Another of their bewitching ways is with small children, especially babies in long clothes. No moorman can keep his hands off a tiny baby. The moment they arrive home from work there is a rush for the cradle. In some cases the mothers have to make a

rule that the fathers must wash their hands before taking baby up, but the men will not wait to do this, if they can avoid it. When christening day arrives, it is always the father who carries the baby to church, while his wife walks, empty armed, beside him. And smart young farmers will carry their tiny babies round the fields or court, talking the divinest nonsense to them, in their liquid dialect. I once started to follow one young farmer with his infant daughter, simply for the joy of hearing the one-sided conversation. I succeeded in gathering that baby Devon for sheep is "sipsies" and for chickens "coopies," but, unfortunately, I was then detected and had to slink home, chastened.

Often I wonder why these men are as they are. I wonder if they are descended from some old gentle race. I wonder how and where they learn etiquette. I wonder if all these things are innate within them. I always decide that this last must be the case, because of small Bertie. He cannot possibly have been taught half the things he does on the spur of the moment. For instance, no one can possibly ever have said to him, "When you are out with Miss Beatrice, mind you move the wheelbarrow out of her way,"

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because only once in my experience has the wheelbarrow ever been in the open.

So I always decide that their chivalry is inborn. They are neither more nor less than normal men, utterly uncivilised, and fresh from the hand of God.

The women are, in their different way, every bit as sweet as the men. Possibly this may be the second explanation of the men's sweetness. I confess, ashamed, that a farm labourer's wife will say and do things as a matter of course which I, in my loftiest moments, could not even conceive. For example, the other day, one of our humble tenants sent an abject message, asking if she might borrow some tea, because she had run out and the men were almost due home for supper. Naturally, I was proud of the request and told a maid to give as much as was wanted. Of course, I myself did not see what was given. Well, that poor woman tried to repay the loan next day. She knew well that she would not be allowed to, but this made no difference. She not only repaid it, but she repaid it by sending in to me an unopened packet of tea, asking me to take out what I wished. Well, I could never have evolved that. I should simply have coarsely sent exactly the measure that had been borrowed.



Another of their sweet ways is an occasional little gift of food. It is only a great lady who can offer food to a person of superior rank, and it always thrills me, the way these obscure great ladies do it. Sometimes it is a gift of honey, or choice apples, or a piece of home-fed pork, or a basin of home-made lard ; sometimes a hog's pudding or a plate of home-cured ham. Oh, the Dartmoor, farmhouse hams ! Sweet, tender pink, fragrant, incomparable ! You cannot buy the equal of them in any shop, however magnificent.

Then there is another concoction called " Poor man's dinner " which always makes me ardently envy the poor man's lot. It is a conglomeration of liver, onion, potato, turnip-top, pie crust and rich gravy ; and it is the most savoury dish that ever emerges from a Dartmoor oven. At intervals it appears at the door, towards dinner-time, piping hot, daintily done up in a white napkin between hot plates, with a beseeching message that she hopes I will not be offended, but—here it is. I am never so proud of anything as I am of these gifts of food from the great ladies of farm and cottage.

This afternoon, I received a call from a working woman. She has been nerving herself for

weeks to come. It is one thing to be on the friendliest terms with me in her own cottage, but quite another boldly to invade me at home. Moreover, there is here now an alarming innovation which both sexes eye with reverence. It is a door bell. We deeply regretted having to add anything so modern to the old house, but it was a question of absolute necessity, for, since the alterations, the rooms are too scattered to permit of the sound of a knock to reach them. We have had to add the bell, running it into the centre of the house. It is very little use, because none of the natives will touch it, unless specially requested to do so, and visits from civilised "foreigners" are, thank heaven, rare. The villagers are convinced that a bell is only for the use of the gentry, so they still hammer unavailingly upon the door and will wait indefinitely rather than desecrate the bell-pull.

My friend of this afternoon had heard rumours of our bell, but she was totally unversed in the etiquette of bell ringing, so, before venturing here, she called for instruction upon one of our tenants who is, by now, hardened to the thing. This woman told me afterwards that my visitor was very timid, even after voluble verbal instruction,

and she wanted for to practise like. "So us hanged up Bill's dinner bag 'pon the bacon hook, and her practised ringing the dinner bag three times 'fore her comed round to your door, Miss Beatrice."

Like the rest and the best of us, these dear, lovable people have their faults. But why record them? When I am accused of being an idealist, as I sometimes am by shallow and hasty people, I retort that idealism is more real than realism.

Beauty and virtue are as real as ugliness and vice, as real and on a higher plane.

It is our virtues, not our sins which, they say, are recorded in the book of life. And I would rather imitate the divine example and write of those things which endure.

## CHAPTER XV

### GRANDFER WEST ON LANDLORDS

“**T**HERE’S a deal to be said for landlords,” remarked old Wilde condescendingly.

He has not altered a jot since his son’s death. At first he drank furiously and in silence. No one ever heard any comment from him but “ ’Twas to be. Us can’t go against it.” What he thought, in his own private mind, or whether he thought anything, we knew not. To-day no one would imagine, or even believe, that a mysterious tragedy had ever been so near him.

Grandfer West at once stooped his rheumatic back after the glove.

“Don’t know where, then,” he quavered. “ ’Tis heart-breaking work, paying away good gold in rent twice a year to a man that don’t want it, half his time. If I’d a had a landlord for years ago——”

“If you’d a had a landlord for years ago,” interrupted Wilde, rudely, “you’d

a bin a deal better off 'en you was. Us wouldn't hear so much 'bout the time you drove your last sheep to market because you couldn't find mate for 'en. If you bain't paying rents, you'm paying the mortgage, which comes to the same thing, or rather more. Landlords don't reckon to get three per cent. in rent on their capital. And you pay four for your mortgage."

I smothered a laugh. Grandfer West never has the smallest chance with old Wilde, but he never learns this.

"You'm paying your good gold twice a year as interest on a mortgage, and paying more than you would be in rent," resumed the avenger. "And besides that, you'm doing your own repairs and paying your own tithes and land tax and income tax—if so be as you've a got an income."

He chuckled wheezily and looked at me. I was the only landlord present. Somehow, this appeared to be my cue. I felt it was time to come on.

We were grouped round a slowly growing oat rick. Jem West was what is jestingly called the "architect," the "ch" being always pronounced soft. To build a rick, especially a corn rick, is no easy matter. If it is not perfectly even, it sinks in one place

or another and is apt to tip over in a heavy gale. A hay rick is much easier to construct, because the material is loose. Corn is in bound bundles which are far more difficult to handle. Further, a corn rick is round and a hay rick square. I always regard the rick-maker with reverent admiration. Two carts were meandering about the field, bringing the bundles to the rick. Three men were scroving—dividing the swathes into bundles—with wooden rakes, and a fourth was binding them deftly with a handful of themselves twisted into a rope of straw. One rick was already finished, and Thatcher Collins was prematurely at work upon it with some of last year's reed. A thatcher's art is enthralling in every department, but there is nothing so utterly fascinating as the way in which he spins his ropes of straw upon a little rough revolving wooden spindle stuck in the side of the rick. He snatches a chaotic handful of loose straw, whirls his spindle round in an apparently haphazard way, and lo! yards of golden ropes emerge, as if by witchcraft. There are few men now left who can spin these ropes of straw.

"In the name of landlords," I began, with mock solemnity, "let me thank you for your sympathy with our sorrows. You enter into



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them so feelingly that you might, once, have been a landlord yourself."

"Not me," chuckled the old sinner. "I wor a better thing nor that. I wor a tenant with a good landlord. I took three-quarters out of his land and gived he one quarter. Some fules talk as if the tenant worked for charity to give everything to landlord. To hear 'en talk, the farmer might not be rearing his children, keeping his wife, and laying by for old age out o' the farm. He might be sweating to keep landlord and naught else."

"I wadn't speaking of mortgages," said Grandfer West, with dignity. "I was talking of a man who owns his own land, only you'm so ready to begin yapping 'fore a man's words be properly out of his mouth, that you didn't wait to hear."

"Don't know any man who owns his own land yere about," retorted Wilde, "so I can't follow 'ee."

A gloom fell upon the assembly at this remark. Each man appeared to be silently examining his own conscience or that of his neighbour, on the question of mortgages.

"And even if a man do own it," concluded Wilde, "'tain't all clear profit by a long shot, for he's a got to pay his repairs and all the taxes."

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“ If I might, in my turn, be permitted to say a word on the subject of tenants,” I began, “ I can say that some tenants are a lasting joy to the hearts of their landlords, and others are contrariwise. There are some who never ask for repairs, who don’t sell produce that ought to be consumed upon the farm, and who keep their gutters open. It may be a prejudice of mine, but the tenant who never allows my beloved fields to become miniature bogs, and who keeps open the mouth of every stream, is fit for canonisation.”

But the subject was too grave for jesting. Indeed, the mystic word “ gutters ” will usually plunge the most optimistic farmer into Stygian gloom. This country is a wet one. Rushes, marsh-marigolds, and other beautiful bog plants have a trick of appearing, with uncanny swiftness, in the middle of one’s best permanent pasture field. And cattle have such an aggravating way of standing in water, if they can, that the cover stones and mouths of the springs are perpetually getting trodden down and choked.

“ Further,” I continued, gazing pointedly at West, “ there are some tenants who never pay their rent to the day. I could name one not a hundred miles away from us

now, who has never paid his rent to the day since he has been here."

I scored my point.

To say that consternation fell on the group does not describe it. They were absolutely petrified. West himself stopped working, with his prang poised for a stab, gazing at me with open-mouthed horror.

"He is always, always early," I finished. "His cheque comes in never less than three days before it is due."

There was a general gasp, and West, turning even redder than he was by nature, removed his hat and wiped his brow with a scarlet handkerchief.

"Well, what I say is," he stammered, in modest confusion, "'tis as easy to pay early as late, if you'm gwain to pay at all."

"But if you would like to know how it is that we landlords make our fortunes and roll luxuriously in gold," I went on, addressing Wilde, "I'll tell you the secret. It's on our cottage property."

There was another breathless silence, and only in the reprobate's eye could I see a comprehending twinkle.

"When the necessary upkeep expenses, repairs, and various taxes were paid on the cottages at Lady Day, my mother cleared the

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princely sum of five shillings and nine pence for the whole of the cottage rents for the twelve months."

I regret to record that, instead of proper sympathy, this information was received with such a shout of laughter as might easily have been heard in the village. They were still roaring by the time I had crossed the field and reached the gate that opens on the moor.

The call of the wild was on me. Moreover, I wanted to visit Thirza. My visit to the cornfield was only a passing one to-day. Yet, some days, it is the fields which call and I spend all the golden hours within their arms, until the last load comes leisurely home perhaps by the light of the harvest moon.

There is no time in the year when the moor is as royally lovely as she is in mid-August. The low-growing dale gorse is in full blossom, flinging a mantle of vivid yellow gold over the moor, up to the very chins of the tors. The heather will not be outdone, and intermingles her regal purple with the gorse's gold. One is the weft, the other the warp, and, together, they weave a robe of shot gold and purple such as no queen has ever worn. They are so closely united that you cannot pick the ling for the gorse thorns, and as neither plant has green leaves, there is nothing to tone down

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the dazzling glory of their colours. But, all the same, heather is mistress. She blooms everywhere, gorse only in certain places. On Rippon Tor, for instance, there is no gorse, nor on Hamildown. Hookner, the great stretch of moor by Merripit to Post bridge and the desolate slopes of Laughter and Bellever from Cator onwards are simply vast sheets of velvet-soft purple, that has half a dozen different shades according to its age and the weather. In its young life the tone is red-purple, later it fades to amethyst and then darkens to a wonderful wine colour, as deep as night yet as vivid as day.

The moor round my Dream Tor is clothed in the robe of gold and purple, intermixed with the blue-gray of many boulders and the scarlet of whortleberry. To get this vividly embroidered foreground against the sombre, unrelieved severity of the wine dark distance takes one's breath away. I wonder if there is any land which surpasses Dartmoor for brightness and depths of colour? They say that this perpetual feast of colour in which we moor people live has a great effect on our mental atmosphere. It produces a warm-hearted, buoyant, refined race. This is comprehensible, for a flat, drab, featureless, colourless country exercises a deadening and

depressing effect upon the spectator. There is no time of the year, except in May, when the moor colours are pale and delicate. Yet even in that season of sunshine and east wind, which sucks all the usual tints out of earth and sky, the land is a gold-veiled glory of opal and pearl, so transparent, so ethereal that one cannot tell where earth ends and heaven begins; and it is during the season of gold and pearl and opal that we dream some of our divinest dreams.

Close to Dream Tor are the remains of an ancient village, with encampment walls, hut circles, and the kistvaens (a Celtic word meaning chest of stone) where prehistoric man was buried, sitting upright with his head upon his knees, awaiting the great dawn.

Here, history hides her modern face and flees away. The relics of primitive man are unthinkable old. Archæologists can only guess at possible dates. Some say that the small and peaceful race which inhabited these barren heights used to trade in tin with the Phœnicians during the reigns of Solomon and David.

Often as I lie on Dream Tor, I ponder about the strange, primitive, almost mythically ancient race whose relics are thick around me. What language did they speak, what



names had they, and what religion? Did they worship any known gods? Who knows? All we know is that they lived and died, mated and buried; so although we have no clue to their language, their religion or their origin, we know that they loved and brought forth children. Thus are they one with us, the latest product of civilisation.

Then I made my way out to Jay's grave, over the vast carpet of purple and gold. Never since that awful afternoon have I found Thirza there again. She does not now even place flowers on the grave, of which I am glad. It is better, all things considered, that she should shun the place than be lured to it by an unwholesome fascination.

I found both girls at home, and both were enchanted to see me.

They are devoted friends, these sisters with their beautiful names, which have been used here for generations. Avis is traceable, as to origin, but I have never succeeded in finding Thirza in any dictionary of names, or in the Bible, either as a surname or Christian name, or the name of any place.

I sat with them for a time in the quaint little low kitchen. Then Avis announced, with unwonted shyness, that she had something to show me. I had half suspected, half

hoped for something of this kind, but her blushes and sparkles were so sweet that I feigned ignorance.

Her colouring is like Thirza's but paler. Her hair is a shade less ruddy, her cheeks are pink beside her sister's rich crimson, and her eyes are blue instead of warm brown. She went over to a carved oak bureau, opened one of the drawers and looked round for me to follow. I went to her, looked in over her shoulder, and saw what I expected—rolls of flannel, linen, and one tiny robe.

"Oh, Avis, is it really true? Thank God. You poor child, what a comfort for you. Aren't you glad? Or is there some sorrow with it?" I asked, taking her into my arms.

"Oh, glad, glad," she exclaimed, with a sob. "'Tis hard to think he'll never see his own child, but 'tis all the world to me to have something of his, his own flesh and blood, left to me. God is wonnerful, baint Him? Only seven weeks married, and yet He had a mind on me. He knowed I was soon to be a widder, so He let me be a mother, to make up. Oh, Miss Beatrice, it do seem as if the child will be to me what no child ever was to its mother yet. And it do seem such a cruel long time to wait till I can see if its a got its daddy's eyes."

I soothed her gently. She was trembling a little and Thirza wept quietly, in sympathy.

After a time her trouble came out.

"Miss Beatrice," she wailed, raising tear-drenched eyes to me, with a look of pleading anguish, "there be one thing that haunts me like a nightmare. Suppose the poor l'il mite don't live to be born? They do say such a shock as I've a had be altogether against it. Oh, what shall I do if it don't live? 'Twill be his only one and 'twill kill me if it dies."

It was piteous to see this poor girl-widow, with no mother nor husband to support her in this time of urgent need.

"Don't think of such a thing any more, not once again," I said gently. "God is good and He wouldn't let you be disappointed. You will be the mother of a bonny baby, you'll see. The shock cannot have hurt you, coming so early. Remember that. It might have, much later. Don't think anything more about it."

Somehow, I was compelled to leave her comforted and at peace, and to my relief she accepted my words with the faith of a child. She dried her pretty eyes, and insisted on making me some tea.

When I at last dragged myself unwillingly away, Thirza followed me out.

"Miss Beatrice, be that true what you said, that her can't have taken no harm yet?" she asked anxiously.

"Quite true," I answered firmly. It was, in a sense, as necessary to inspire faith in Thirza as in Avis. "Keep her up to it, if she gets low-spirited and nervous. Don't let her worry."

"I won't," she promised. "Oh, Miss Beatrice, I be some glad. 'Tis wonnerful, sure 'nough. And 'tis all the difference to me," she added, with a glorious blush.

I stood still to look at her. "What do you mean?"

"Why, miss," she said, shyly, fidgeting with the corner of her apron. "'Tis what have given me courage, like, to name the day for George."

"You don't mean it," I exclaimed joyfully. "Oh, Thirza, I am delighted. When is it to be?"

"At Christmas, Miss Beatrice. I seem to see it all now, same as George do. He's right. 'Tis worth it."

With that she left me to pursue my way. As I did so, my heart was overflowing with gratitude. Never in my life have I been so

touched as I am by the sublime view that these poor unlettered girls take of motherhood. To the one, it was the immortalising of her dead husband's love. To the other, it has brought the perfection of married love—the desire to be the mother of her husband's children, without which longing upon both sides marriage is shorn of its supremest happiness.

Remembering the manly perfection of George's love for Thirza, I rejoiced to see that his patience was to be at last rewarded with a similar love. He is willing to lay down his life for Thirza. Now she is willing to lay down hers, if need be, to become the mother of his children: for this possible sacrifice is implied when a wife consents to motherhood.

It is no wonder that a man loves his mother and wife. He knows that both have been willing, for his sake, to risk their lives if need be.

Happy woman, whose destiny thus enables her always to give a greater love to man than he can ever give to her !

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE TWEED DOG AND A BABY

**I**N future, I am not going to have any more fainting fits alone on the moor—not, at any rate, if the Tweed Dog is there to render me first aid.

It happened thus. The Tweed Dog loves me not wisely but too well. In all my experience of dogs, there never was a dog with such a heart as hers. As far as I know, I have done nothing to win the love that she gives me. She does not belong to me and her name is not Tweed Dog. It is her title—bestowed on her by me—which no one else presumes to use. She arrived here, some time ago, as a stranger, and to be Ben's understudy. At once I noticed that she was extraordinarily affectionate and extraordinarily well-bred. All she asks is love. She will stand literally by the hour together, beside one's chair in the garden, while one strokes her. If one stops for a minute, she noses after a hand and grouts at it, till she



wiggles it up into position on her head again. If I am gardening, she comes behind me and slips her head under my right armpit, and I am expected to do everything while she is in that position.

The moment I put my nose outside the house, she is after me, leaping with joy. When I am indoors she spends all her time outside the window where I write, gazing in. Even after dark, she still remains, and I can see a dab of white shirt front and two bright eyes in the light thrown by the lamp through the uncurtained window, on the raised bank outside where she sits. Before I am up in the morning she comes to sing funny little songs under my window. She is, in appearance, the typical Dartmoor sheep-dog, about the size and build of a collie, but short-haired, with brindled coat and white points. Her eyes are kind, clear amber-brown. She is exactly the colour of a disreputable old tweed dress of mine which I have had quite seven years and still cling to because I shall never get its like again. It is a mixture of white, black, fawn and hot chestnut brown, and as the Tweed Dog stands with her head in my lap, she and the dress might have come out of the same dye vat. Both are precisely the colour of the speckled granite roads when they are wet with rain.

I have an understanding with her master that I am allowed to take her for walks, between cow, calf, and bullock times, so we go every day, and it has occurred to me to wonder what she would do if I were to have any kind of accident, such as a sprained ankle, a fall from a tor, a bite from a snake, or any other ill which might, and never does, befall young women alone on Dartmoor.

So to-day I decided to act a fainting fit and thus probe still deeper the depths of the gentle heart. When she was forty yards ahead, I dropped suddenly face downwards on the turf, without a sound, and awaited developments. I did not wait more than a few seconds. First, there was the rush of a heavy body travelling at top speed. Next, my hat was carried away at one blow, pins and all, to fly twenty yards with the Tweed Dog who had rushed at me too fast to pull herself up. When she was able to turn, she came back, in similar style, thrust her nose and head under my shoulders and worked frantically to roll me over. I was too heavy, so she then went round to try at the other side. Her one idea appeared to be to get me face upwards for air. But she was not strong enough, so then she fell to frantic lickings of every scrap of neck, cheek and

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ear that she could reach, and her agitation was becoming so frenzied that I was obliged to jump up, saying I was quite well, thank you.

Poor darling! she did her very best, and it is clear that if trouble ever should befall me, I shall not lack sympathy. No doubt, if I had remained recumbent she would have begun to bark and this would eventually have brought help from somewhere.

When she takes me for a road walk, it always appears to me that it must be a great mental strain on her. I am never for a moment out of her thoughts. She walks always about thirty yards ahead, and at every gate she pauses to see if I am entering a field. It is the same, of course, at every cross-road, and wherever I go in she waits, uninvited, and never mislays me. It is refreshing to consort with a creature who has one main idea which is never forgotten, after the idiotic preoccupation of humanity. When the Tweed Dog takes me for a walk, her one duty is never to let me out of her sight, at any cost. She cheerfully assumes all responsibility, all risks. I may double on my tracks, dodge round corners, enter a house by one door and leave it by another: nothing excuses her if she loses me.

Nothing ever has to be explained to her and

she has never to be called to attention. When we crowd through gateways around which are waiting perhaps a dozen cows, her demeanour is entirely perfect. She has never seen a cow in her life before, does not even know what it is. Bark at them? Oh dear, no! Such an idea never enters her head. At the sight of cattle she always comes close to heel, and follows me sedately through the herds, without even turning her head to look at one of them. It is the same with rabbits. Sometimes, on the moor, her self-possession is sorely tried by them, but a word recalls it. On one occasion, she even had a dead one actually in her mouth, but she put it down instantly, when told to, and followed me home without one backward look. My lightest word, at any time, on any subject, is law.

She is never morose, never short in the temper, never busy, never disobedient. Her mood is as sweet in icy slush as it is on a lily-scented day of summer. I may beat her, scold her, drive her away from me, and she never resents it nor asks an explanation: next time we meet her air is as unruffled as if I had never been harsh. She demands no justice, desires no explanations, urges no rights. All she asks is to be allowed to love. Often I wonder whether any human lover gives me an equal love. Still oftener, I ask

my troubled conscience whether I ever love like this.

The love that I exact from the Tweed Dog is precisely the type of love which a man demands from a woman. He expects her to receive his worst as well as his best. She is his queen but she must also be his slave. He arrogates the right to break every commandment yet to be forgiven, even though impenitent. He must be allowed to treat her with mistrust, cruelty, injustice, and his motives must never be questioned. He must be permitted to drive her from his side with harsh ingratitude, but she must return at his first call, without a shade of resentment or a degree less love. Whatever he does, whatever he becomes, she must love unfalteringly and in the dark.

Viewed superficially, man's standard of love makes a woman's blood boil over with resentment at the servility which he expects. Look deeper and you find in it the most magnificent flattery. He asks a love which no strain can break, a love which is a replica of the divine. He knows his own weakness and his own wickedness. The normal man never has delusions about his own worth. If anything, he underestimates himself. And he knows well that his need of love is sore.

This self-knowledge teaches him to demand a love that will cover all his sins, however manifold. It is a love which only a woman can give, and that not because she is woman, but because she is, by reason of her womanhood, essentially the mother. No man can love like this, and man knows his limitations. No woman can, merely as a woman. If a woman tries to go through life loving only as woman, she will get her heart broken, her every ideal shattered, and her sweet soul soured. She must love with the highest love. The second highest will not suffice. And then, no matter what sorrows befall her, all will be well with her. She must love like a mother—or like God. Those two sacred names are almost synonymous. The heart of a mother is the only mirror in all creation wherein we can see reflected the true nature of the heart of God.

These, or this, is one of my dearest thoughts, and I know, by experience, that it is also one of the truest. It is dominating my mind again just now, because I went, yesterday, to visit a tiny new tenant at one of the cottages. The common daily miracle of motherhood is vividly present to me these days.

The new-comer is a baby girl, born three days ago. When I went up into the humble



white-washed room I found it in bed with its mother, while the dethroned baby, a boy of two, was asleep in the wicker cradle with one little sunburnt arm thrown over his eyes.

It is an utterly sweet new baby with dark downy hair, the most perfect triangle of a mouth, and bright, intelligent eyes. The mother told me, with quiet glee, that she was scrubbing the kitchen at half past-nine, felt "rather funny like" and the baby was born at eleven.

This is quite the usual way out here. It is very rarely possible for a doctor to arrive in time, even if he is wanted at all, which is seldom. A wise, simple village midwife has assisted at every birth here for the past twenty-five years at least, so, in some instances, she has welcomed the arrival of two generations, and she has never lost a case. She goes, too, to all the dead to make them ready for their last sleep. It is a wonderful life, from birth to death, from death to birth, and I would go a long way to see that woman handle a tiny baby. What she does not know of baby lore is not worth knowing. I often think how enthralling it must be to her to watch each child growing up till it marries and has babies of its own. Sometimes she is present at a wedding, after having assisted,

years before, at the birth of both bride and bridegroom.

Her wide-mindedness and tender-hearted wisdom are a study. Visitors to the proud new mother are allowed at once. She was hugely amused at my town-bred notions as to undue excitement. Further, she does not believe in separating husband and wife at this most momentous time of married life.

"If so be as her wants her husband, let her have 'en," I remember she once said. "'Tis a comfort to 'en bòth. It helps her to bear the pain to have he to hold to, and he baint so worried and anxious like if he can help her in her need."

O sublime wisdom that binds husband and wife still closer together! The poor have hard lives but vast compensations. Things are far more evenly distributed than they appear to be on the surface, and, as a general principle, peasants are immeasurably happier than princes. Why is it, what other reason can there be than this—that lacking most other things, they have love? Husbands and wives on the poorest classes are far more faithful to each other than are the rich. The men, as well as the women, have a horror of infidelity. They are faithful to their marriage vow, and to the personal service of each other.

How common it is, when the wife is to be laid up, to hear her lamenting the intrusion of another woman even for a fortnight. It is not a question of money, for frequently the helper is a relative who works for love. The wife might reasonably be glad of a rest from her unceasing labours, but she is not. Her main anxiety is to be about again to "do" for her husband and the other children. After years of toil, she grudges him to other care for even two short weeks. And on his side, how patiently he works for her and the children and the home. The gentleman of inherited position writes his wife the periodical cheque, but he never has the manly joy of taking home the week's hard earnings, or of knowing that but for his willing head and hands and heart, the home and its helpless inmates would perish. Fancy the dignity of being competent to keep yourself and a home and wife and children, year after year! Think of your worth!

Yet almost above all is the love that both man and woman have for the children. How gladly the man goes short of food and clothing that he may feed and clothe child after child. His income does not increase with his family, yet he never grudges the arrival of each new, hungry little mouth. He

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works harder, goes shorter, and finds it worth it.

And his wife is even nobler. The women with servants and nurses find their children a burden at times, even when they can turn over the care of them at any moment to someone else. Think of the working woman's life, with its years of toiling days and broken nights. Probably for fifteen years she has an unceasing round of cleaning, cooking, mending, and child-bearing on insufficient food and with insufficient rest. Yet she, too, finds it worth it, and is placidly content with her lot. Verily, love is its own reward.

Nature intends husband and wife to be absolutely dependent upon each other, and the children upon both. And if we could return to a natural way of living, we should hear less of the Divorce Court and a dwindling birth rate. Here, on Dartmoor, children are hailed as a blessing, the more the merrier; and couples with sixteen shillings a week to live on will have a family of eight healthy children. Do not wonder at me, when I say that I count it an honour to be allowed to kiss the woman's thin cheek and to clasp the man's hard hand. They are holier, happier and healthier than we, and they deserve to be.

As I was returning from the moor after my

fainting fit, I walked straight into an idyll whose unexpectedness filled me with amazed delight.

I came home by a devious road route which led eventually to Granny Caunter's cottage. It was evening, with a sunset as gold as the cornfields, and out in the little garden, among the crimson hollyhocks, I caught sight of Jenny. Her ebon hair, white skin, and red lips looked uncommonly fine against the background of gold sky and vivid blossoms. I stopped to admire and to exchange greetings, but before I had time to speak, I luckily noticed that my admiration had been anticipated by someone else and that in a marked degree. Among the tall flowers, ostensibly weeding, but undoubtedly love-making, was young Willcox. He held a hoe negligently in one hand, while the other clasped Jenny's.

I was too petrified with astonishment to retain either manners or presence of mind. I simply stared over the box hedge with a vulgar, impertinent, goggle-eyed stare. The Tweed Dog halted and stood beside me, awaiting developments.

I was not interested in Willcox. The supreme point of interest was Jenny.

Breathless, I watched to see her pulverise this presuming young man.

But no thunderbolt fell. She stood, the picture of demure delight. In a few seconds Bill dropped the hoe, clasped her round the waist and——

Before the kiss, I fled.

O scornful maid! O mighty man-hater! Can it be that thou hast fallen from thy high estate to love a common man? Or dost thou only stoop to break his honest heart?

Time will show. But, as far as mortal may, I shall gently push the hands of his clock on a little bit. If the lovers themselves are not impatient for the denouement, I am.



## CHAPTER XVII

### THE CONQUEST OF JENNY

**T**O my immense exasperation, I have had a visitor for a fortnight, a visitor who has swallowed up all my leisure. So I have not been able to visit Jenny till to-day, nearly three weeks after the idyll among the hollyhocks.

When I did get her to myself, I made up for lost time.

"Jenny," I began, before mounting the white stairs to see Granny, "what beautiful hollyhocks you had three weeks ago. Are they still in flower? You know, I have been parted from you all and obliged to lead a temporarily and slightly respectable life lately. And I am craving for information."

She looked at me with suspicion—hopeful sign!

"Hollyhocks, miss?" she echoed, dubiously. "Yes, I reckon they'm still there, some of 'en. Would you like a bunch?"

"No, no," I answered hurriedly. "What

I like to see is a maid with black hair standing among them at sunset."

She eyed me again, and a very faint tint crept up to her wax white cheeks.

"Especially when she is helping a charming young man to weed," I added.

There was no mistake about the blush then. It heightened to delicate rose colour.

"I love the way dark people blush," I continued. "It's so artistically delicate, so different from my gaudy efforts."

"Oh, Miss Beatrice," she exclaimed hotly, though she could not, of course, fully understand my banter. "You can't mention you and me in the same breath—you, with your lovely gold hair and bright skin, and me with my smutty head and pasty face."

"Thank you, generous thing. But there are people who prefer ebon hair to gold. And some young men admire black hair and pale complexions immensely."

This time she lowered her head and began laughing shyly. It was a revelation to see Jenny in the rôle of a coy maiden.

"I reckon you'm a big tease, Miss Beatrice. Well, 'tis no use to hide anything from you. Will Willcox have asked me to marry him."

If I had been a man I should have uttered a prolonged whistle.

"Brave, brave young man! And what have you answered?"

"I haven't 'xactly answered at all," she purred.

"Are you going to keep him on the rack, only to break his heart at last?" I enquired severely.

The girl's smile fled like breath off a mirror.

"No fey, Miss Beatrice," she said, looking suddenly pale and shocked. "'Twould be some cruel when he loves me."

"But I thought men are cruel. Why don't you pay them out in their own coin? And how do you know he loves you? He may be after your money, like the other one was."

Jenny looked at me with righteous disgust. I had hoped she would and I was rewarded.

"Not all men baint cruel," she expostulated. "And I ain't got no money now for he to be after. So 'tis true love, this time. Besides, there ain't no mistaking it. If I'd a got a hundred pounds, I should know Will wadn't after it. He be after me alone."

"Jenny, this is a very sudden conversion. Will it last? What about the first quarre? What about the time when Will is bound to offend you, one way or another?"

"I shall forgive him," she answered

promptly. "Us be only mortal and have all got our faults."

"Jenny, this is too colossal. I can't take it in, all at a sitting. Do you mean to tell me that you really, sincerely, honestly love a man, believe in his love for you, and even propose to forgive him any offences against you?"

"'Tis what I do mean then," she answered slowly and with a light on her face that was good to see. "I was wrong to talk of men as I did back along. I know better now. 'Tis love has learned me. 'I reckoned I loved Edwin once. But I didn't, never—or I could have forgiven even he."

"Jenny," I said, after a reverent silence, "no queen on her throne is richer than you are to-day. Perhaps few are as rich. I am glad from my heart. You know I am. I was only teasing just now, to draw you out."

"I know you was," she exclaimed, bursting into tears. "You'm always kind, miss. You was kind to me when I was wicked. You never said a cross word to me."

"My poor child, why should I? The day may come when I, too, shall be wicked, and I shall be glad to have even one friend who will never scold me. Besides, you were not wicked. You were simply wretched. There is very little real wickedness in life, if any. It's

mostly wretchedness, recklessness, despair. Only blind mortals don't understand. But tell me, dear, when is it to be ? "

" Not while Granny be still with us," she sobbed. " Will wouldn't take me from her, even if I would go. But us won't have to wait very long seemingly. I'm 'fraid her won't last the winter."

She threw herself down on the settle and rocked herself to and fro, shaken with sobs.

" Never mind," I said, when I could speak. " God knows best. He will take her when He wants her. We shall have to let her go. But I don't know how we shall live without her."

We sat for a long time without further speech. Intermingled with my own sorrow was gratitude to see Jenny transformed at last; and almost more precious than her love for Will was her love for her grandmother, with its perfect unselfishness. Before the end, Granny has taught her the virtue of willing service, service at the expense of self which transforms the soul into the likeness of a certain King who took the form of a servant.

" Is she to know ? " I asked at last, rising to make my way upstairs.

" Not yet. Soon, perhaps, because her'll be glad. But I shouldn't like for her to know

till her knoweth 'bout her own self, and us baint sure yet if her doth know."

I found the old lady very placid, very happy, very frail. It was a typical day of young September and the still sunshine flowed in upon the white bed near the window, which was wide open. The air was so serene that the little white muslin blind scarcely stirred.

I sat beside her for a time, speaking of the now finished harvest. Then we fell silent, and after a time she spoke.

" 'Tis the last harvest I shall see, ah, and the last spring too. Reckon I shall pretty well go with the swallows. But I shan't come back with they."

I held my breath. She seemed to be speaking to herself—or to some one whom I could not see.

" Well, I be very tired. And I shall see John again, after more'n thirty years. No one but the widder knoweth what 'tis to bury your husband, and to pass the nights alone. To wake, night times, and put out your hand, forgetting, to feel for 'en, and he not there, never there again. No one knoweth."

She paused, and I wept in silence.

" 'Tis a long time to miss your husband. But I shall see 'en 'fore cuckoo cometh again. I be glad to think it. And poor Jenny,



her'll be able to take a mate now if her's a mind to. I be some glad 'bout that too, while her's still young. I reckon the Lord be kind—so thoughtful like, for us poor people. They tell 'bout how He always had mind on the poor. And for certain He's had a mind on me, right to the end."

I rose and slid softly away. I feared to vex her golden calm with my earthly sorrow, so I went to tell Jenny that Granny knows and it will be safe to tell her news.

Then I went straight out upon the moor, still crying. I cannot bear the thought of losing any one of the old generation whose like we shall never, never see again. All nature seemed to be in tune with my sorrow, which was more melancholy than true sorrow. As I say, it was a golden day, but it was the gold of heaven rather than of earth. No gay breezes desecrated the perfect calm. The hush was so tense that one could almost hear the Sickle of the Great Reaper in the far distance.

On our moor, the men were cutting bracken. That is the last harvest of the year and, in one way, the most picturesque. Early and late we hear the swish of the scythe and the slow rumble of the wains. Bracken has to be cut by hand, for it is impossible to take a machine in among the boulders. It is kindly stuff,

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bracken, and so is its colleague, gorse. They two, with heather, are the Dartmoor Trinity, but the heather is the least useful of the three to man and beast. The gorse makes firing for the cottagers, and the beds of ricks, while the uses of bracken are endless. Primarily, it is used for bedding cattle instead of straw, which enables the farmer to consume his straw, this being cut up in a chaff-cutting machine and given to the bullocks. There are valuable salts in bracken, too, which are precious to the land as manure, and it is used for bedding down potatoes and other roots, for doormats, for lighting fires, instead of paper, for twenty different things. Its harvest begins the first week in September, and it is made into ricks like hay and corn.

In July, when the bracken is full size and before it begins to turn red, its fronds reflect the light most exquisitely. Often, towards sunset, when the light is sloping, I stand on a tor facing west, to look down across a vast stretch of bracken; and I might be looking over the surface of a shimmering silver sea. Every frond and branch flashes silver in a certain light.

The moor ponies are much disturbed by this harvest. Their own particular territory is invaded by men, dogs, carts, and fellow

horses—fellow horses wearing clumsy leather loops and humps, with a horrid black shutter beside each eye, and a steel bar in their mouths. The wild ponies regard these phantom beasts with snorting terror, and flee, surefootedly, among the rocks, with tails that sweep the turf behind them. The worst shock that I have ever seen given to their nerves was a wholly accidental one, perpetrated by a farmer from a distant parish. He was riding his pony, one afternoon, over the moor, and dismounted for a time to examine some sheep for a friend who was too busy to do it himself. He fastened his pony's bridle to a small gorse bush and threw his coat, loose, on the saddle. When he was too far off to render any assistance, the coat suddenly took a leap and at one jump wrapped itself tightly round the pony's head. She, of course, at once went raving mad with fright, and in her frantic struggles to dislodge the coat, tore up the gorse bush by the roots. Thus freed, she bolted.

The coat held on like an octopus, so did the gorse bush; so, in a few minutes, a Phantom Pony was tearing over the moor with her head wrapped in a strange, dark garment with flapping arms, and a gorse bush streaming from her bridle in the wind. Instinctively, she sought her own kind for

comfort. But her ownkind would have none of her. I have seen moor ponies gallop before and since, but never did I see the pace they achieved that day. Herds of twenty or thirty travelled like the wind in all directions.

When the Phantom One had started one lot, she would turn to another. They in their turn roused the sheep and bullocks, who fled in herds before the avengers. Two elderly ladies, who were harmlessly perambulating the moor, sought the nearest tor and climbed its highest rock, too terrified to know clearly what they were doing. Men on the farms below saw what had happened, and snatching horses, started in pursuit of the phantom. This, of course, made confusion worse confounded. Then the coat gave it up and dropped from her. But this did not, in the very least, restore her self-possession, for the gorse bush still remained. After a long chase, they surrounded and captured her. Then a deputation clomb the tor and fetched down the elderly ladies, who were in a state of nervous collapse. They, very properly, said Dartmoor was the most awful place they had ever seen in their lives, and utterly unfit for civilised gentlewomen, and they left next day.

But I can believe that, from generation to

generation of moor ponies, will be handed down the awful legend of the Phantom Pony, once seen in broad daylight by reliable great-grandfathers and grandmothers.

They are sagacious beasts, though, these same ponies : hardy, too, and able to live on short rations. They will carry a man weighing fifteen stone for forty miles in a day and not turn a hair. If he is "market merry," they will bear him safely through the bogs and boulders which they have known from birth, and will bring him safely to his door, through the thickest fog Dartmoor ever wrapped around her vast shoulders. If a man gets caught in fog, either riding or driving a moor pony, and is uncertain of the way home, he drops the reins, leaving the pony to it. And, even in the dead of night, the pony never errs. It is an extraordinary power, this power of home, finding in what we rashly call the lower animals. I suppose superior man will never even understand it.

With dogs, of course, it is by the power of scent and, in truth, this is wonderful enough, though we are so used to it that it ceases to amaze us. Once only, when out walking, have I succeeded in giving the Tweed Dog the slip. I left her grouting in a village dustbin, fled along the main road to the first by-road,

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turned up this, and sat down in the hedge to await developments. In ten minutes she appeared, haggard with care, tearing along the main road with her nose almost in the mud. She could have seen me easily, but it was not eye work then. She stopped dead, at the very spot where my footsteps had turned off at right angles up the by-road, started off after this trail, turned again where I had sought the hedge, and rushed slap into me as I sat. She never raised her head or eyes once from the ground, and fell over me before she had time to stop.

With horses, however, the home is not traced by scent. Their power is something quite unfathomable. There is one old horse here who is turned out at times on the moor to grass. He stays out all right during the day, but towards evening he solemnly brings himself home. It never matters where he is led to in the morning; he is never to be confused. One thing alone puzzles him: he has lived for some years at this hamlet, and for some years previously at the next one. At evening you may see him standing alone at the corner, buried in thought, laboriously trying to mind whether this is the place or if it is the further one. And he always decides eventually that this is right, and marches



majestically to his own court gate. But it requires deep thought.

Cows have the same power. Jem West sold one not long ago, and she walked the fifteen miles to the home of her new owner. Early next morning, an unwonted bellowing broke the farmyard peace. West went to see what it meant, and there was White Horns demanding admission. She had brought herself home alone over the moor through the night.

The instinct of the cock, too, is another extraordinary phenomenon. How does he know dawn? Mind, he does not crow at sunrise, but at dawn, and there is a vast difference. Moreover, he is not, in well managed farms, loose in the open, watching the sky from a suitable vantage ground. He is shut up in a dark fowl-house without a window. Yet he never makes a mistake. He never oversleeps himself. He never wakes suddenly on a moonlight night and thinks he has been caught napping. Our reigning cock is the most conscientious bird and has the most majestic voice I ever heard in any cock.

Very occasionally they forget to shut the little trap-door at the top of the narrow wooden ladder which is exclusively for the use of the fowls. On these farms, half-way up the fowl-house wall, is a small hole, from which

a ladder reaches to the ground outside. It is very narrow, with only room for one bird at a time, and it is a portentous business for the whole harem to emerge in single file. If this door is left open in July, for instance, the cock is out by half-past three, doing his duty nobly. First, he goes to the farm bedroom window and announces morning about fifty times straight off, without stopping. Then he takes our bedroom windows in turn. After that, he struts round to the cottages, one at a time. When he has finished there, he returns to the farm, then comes to us, and so on, round and round, keeping it up till the entire population of the hamlet is awake and cursing earnestly, according to the range of individual vocabulary. I never know why he knows that he is created to rouse men from their beds at dawn, and still less do I know why he never wastes his volleys except below a bedroom window. It is uncanny.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### MOOR MAGIC AND AN OMEN

**A**S the year drifts on, my thoughts become even more filled with George and Thirza. I long, with petty human impatience, to reach their wedding-day, that I may see if our premonition will come true, and whether, for them, the curse will be averted. But Fate is divinely slow. Not for prayers nor tears nor even blood will she be hastened, and one must, perforce, await the slow unrolling of her mystic scroll at her own royal pleasure.

It is good to watch Jenny and Will, for there one sees an ordinarily pretty love idyll, except for one touch which lifts it above the small to the great and the extraordinary. That touch is the transformation of the woman, once so ignoble, into a true lover, which makes her a partaker of the divine itself. Their wedded life will be placid, free from heights and depths, but it can never be commonplace. The woman will never forget her former self,

nor ever cease to love the man whose kiss awakened her from poisoned sleep to the glad gold day of love.

But the love of George and Thirza is a thing above and apart from the rest. Obscure, unlettered, lowly born, they are on the highest plane possible to humanity. They prepare steadily and calmly, as if for some great sacrament. There are no doubts nor fears, no regrets, no looking back.

George has taken a farm between Graystone and Bellever. This will be their home, for better, for worse, for years or only for weeks. It is a Michaelmas farm, so he has had to take possession of it at the end of this month, though they will not live there till their marriage at Christmas. But already George is preparing to buy the present farmer's stock and making the many arrangements necessary to a young farmer when he first leaves his father's land to begin life for himself. Mr. Coombe says nothing whatever about the matter. No one can wring any comment from him or induce him to discuss the thing at all. It seems to me that he is getting to stoop a little, and that the lines on his face are deeper, but this may be simply vivid fancy on my part. Still, one knows that he must feel something. No man—especially such a

man as he—can see his only son take a step which, to put it at the lowest degree of possibility, has inexplicably proved fatal to other men.

I visited the future home yesterday, going first to Bellever Tor, the central tor of Dartmoor, the core of the heart of the moor. First, the way led along the shining granite roads, over open moor, and beside black plantations. The very high-roads glisten in this enchanted upland. In dry weather, the sun strikes light from a myriad specks of quartz in the white dust, and one's happy feet might be treading a way powdered with diamond dust.

In the times of alternating sun and shower, especially the drenching northerly showers, when the lights are sharp and clear, and the bright intervals intensely blue, the roads are shining blue ribands, stretching out to touch the blue horizon. The Northern Nannie is rapid and drenching, and she is swiftly pursued by the sunshine, which seizes the wet highways before they have time to dry and transforms them into mirrors whereon heaven may stoop, smiling, to reflect her blue.

Yesterday the road to Bellever was powdered with diamonds and led me along to the desolate rise of unbroken, sooty amethyst

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in whose dark velvet there are vast black gashes where men cut peat in June. The road leaps the Dart and then stops. She may not invade the sanctuary of Bellever.

It is a long climb up the heather-clad side of the hill to the rocks at the top. Rim after rim of hill rolls north, south, east, and west to every horizon ; tor after tor stands silent, impassive, age after age around its king. Bellever is not only the centre of the moor, you can *see* that it is the centre. Hey, the steadfast sentinel, looms midge-like against the eastern sky. Longaford lifts his huge bulk in the near west, and on the southern side are the low gray walls of the great prison, coiled under the Hessarys like some savage mammoth reptile.

I have made a discovery about Bellever : he possesses a feature which, when known about any tor, is always marked on the Ordnance maps. In his case, the attribute is not marked, and I never intend to disclose the secret lest it be destroyed by profane hands.

He loves me more than any tor loves me, because I alone saw a certain vision of white manhood lying, like a sacrificial victim, upon one of his great altar-like slabs of granite.

Ah yes, Bellever and I have our secrets,



one at least of which will be revealed, with fitting glory, when the Recording Angel at last opens his golden scroll.

Only one who ever reads this book will understand the meaning of this passage, and I doubt if even he knows that he alone holds, and always will hold, my heart in the hollow of his hand.

There is an indescribable sense of desolation, of mystery, in visiting this rock heart of the moor, below which winds the Dart, wailing for a heart on her way to the far distant sea.

And yesterday I was fated to see such a sunset as I never before beheld. It could only happen, I should think, once in a long life.

As I mounted the side of the hill, I noticed a dull glow in the south behind the tor. It could not be described as light. When I reached the summit, the whole moor was unrelieved soot-black. There was no light, and, consequently, no shadows. The moor rolled like the vast billows of a black, dead sea. Since I started from home the sky had become covered by a black pall without one ray of light or edging of transparency. Earth and sky were heavy, sombre, opaque, infernal. Behind Longaford it looked as if hell had been

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recently stirred to emit a solid smoke which was too thick for even the fire to penetrate except in one place. It was as though the whole world were burning pitch.

After a time, the clouds slowly opened just a slit and something loomed indefinite through the aperture—something of a dead fire colour. The wind folded her pinions and stood beside me to watch. There was not a sound nor a breath.

Slowly the black pall continued to open till the something revealed itself as the sun, still high above the horizon. He was vivid scarlet and of enormous size, yet when he was entirely unveiled, not one ray of light escaped. He threw no light either on the clouds or the moor. He seemed to have absorbed every ray into himself because light would never again be needed. I could well have believed that this was the last sunset of the world. He took one long look at the cold black moor, as though he would never see it again ; then, very slowly, and still in the awful silence, he drew back the clouds till there was not even a dull gleam to show where he had been. It was desolation, despair, finality.

With quivering nerves I left the tor and made my way on to Easterbrook farm, Thirza's future home.

The old tenants have left it, and the dwelling-house is being prepared for fresh occupation. It is a lonely place, guarded by one black sentinel fir which moans softly, high over the thatched roof.

As I stood outside the gate, doubting if I would enter the house, my heart leapt with terror. A mason was at work, with ladder, buckets, and a brush. As his figure emerged from the entry into the white porch, I saw that it was the man with the iron mask.

Poor Thirza ! It is surely an evil omen that this sinister, tragic figure should be chosen to prepare for her her future home.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE PASSING OF GRANNY CAUNTER

**P**oor Jenny! Her newly acquired principles are soon being tested. Yesterday I found her crying alone by the fire. They were not noisy tears, but the silent sorrow of despair. It was some time before she could speak coherently. Then I learnt that Will did not love her and she wished she was dead.

"They say Dart be crying for her heart. And 'twouldn't be no odds to me if 'twere mine," she sobbed in conclusion.

Only at rare intervals does the river make this peculiar cry. It is like the cry of the cleaves in Cornwall, or the moaning of the bar at Westward Ho: fitful, and utterly mysterious. The cry of the Dart is almost always in autumn, and is supposed to be due to the first autumn rains which flush her tributaries. This theory, however, is fallible, for, in some seasons, it will rain in torrents

for weeks before the sound is heard ; in others, it will rise before the rains begin.

All I know is that it gives me the eeriest feeling I ever experience when I hear men say that Dart is crying.

A chill shiver ran over me at Jenny's words. I had not quite recovered from the unutterable melancholy of the sunset on Bellever, nor from the horror of seeing the man with the iron mask haunting Thirza's future home. On top of both came fresh trouble, with the hungry, savage, inexplicable legend to crown it.

"Don't suggest or hint at anything of the kind," I said severely. One attempted suicide has been more than enough to last me for a long lifetime. I do not want another. And these warm southern natures are as emotional as the varying skies of the moor.

"Tell me about it sensibly," I pleaded. "Only the other day you told me that Will does love you and that you do love him. And you also said you would forgive him anything."

"So I will," she exclaimed, casting away her apron and exhibiting a healthy inclination to quarrel with me. "I do love him and I will forgive him. 'Tis he that don't love me."

"If that is all," I remarked consolingly,

"let me tell you this at once. Love is two-sided. If you really love him, he loves you. Love between man and woman cannot be generated in one heart alone. It takes two to make it. It is like the spark that flies from the union of flint and steel. It can't come from the steel alone or from the flint alone. Come, Jenny, be brave. You know you didn't love poor Edwin, and it was very clear he didn't love you. But this is utterly different. It will come right. But do tell me how it happened."

At this she began to cry again, and it was some time before I could extract from her that Will had seen her out walking with Collins the thatcher, and had taunted her with being a flirt. She had indignantly denied the accusation, indeed, had been deeply hurt by it; but Will, with all the extravagant ownership of a man's first love, grudged even the sunshine that lighted her, still more every man she spoke to. And it was cruel.

I did not cavil at this jealousy in Will. It seemed to me simply the normal condition of the primeval savage—healthy, honest, and earnest.

I tried to instil this view into Jenny, who did not take to it as kindly as I wished,



though she eventually admitted that, looked at from one standpoint, it was a compliment.

"How was it you came to be walking with Collins at all?" I asked, by way of digression.

"That be the unkindest cut of all. Us wadn't together more'n five minutes. I was coming home from church, Sunday evening, and in a hurry to get back to Granny, and he overtook me, coming this way. I could not ask he to walk on, could I? 'Twould ha' been like a silly sheep. But 'twadn't as if I wanted to look at 'en, even—a drunken, smutty-mouthed fellow, half his time. 'Tis cruel of Will." And she went on sobbing.

I pondered. It is always doubtful policy to smooth the course of true love when it is not running smooth. Usually, one only makes it rougher and gets cordially hated by both lovers.

"Jenny," I said, at last, "it will come right. Keep quiet for a few days and Will will make a sign. He's much too fond of you to live without you very long. Starve him out. A little fasting isn't bad for men at times. But when he does come, for goodness, sake go to meet him. Meet him half-way. Don't give yourself silly airs and graces. Remember, you on your side have said hard things to him. We always do scream when

we are hurt. But our lovers don't always realise that it's just because we do care so very much that we are so thorny. There are times when a woman has to be a mother to the man she loves. When you meet him first, meet him as a mother, not as a lover. Then it will come right. And remember this: love must be tried. It's worth nothing till it is. Silver has to go through the furnace. So has gold. Gems have to be cut and polished. It is the same with love. And the furnace can no more destroy love than it can destroy silver and gold. Do you believe this?"

"Yes, Miss Beatrice," she replied, with dove-like meekness. "Something in me seems to say 'tis true. I'll mind what you say. Do 'ee think he'll be here to-night?" she asked wistfully.

"I don't know," I answered. But I mentally decided that if I happened to meet Will, I would give him a hint. I would not go out of my way to meet him, but would merely leave it to chance.

"How is Granny?" I asked, mindful of the patient, waiting soul for whom the fires and storms and floods of love are past for ever.

"Frail, very frail. Her be sinking fast.

Her's sleeping now, Miss Beatrice, so you'd best not go up."

"I'll go up, but I won't wake her," I promised, slipping off my shoes.

Her bedroom door stood always open, and I stole, without a sound, over its threshold.

The low little white room was lighted by one window facing east. The only sound was the heavy, laboured breathing. As I listened it seemed as if the weary work of drawing breath must soon be over. She was lying quite quiet, and a neat, close little white cap had taken the place of the lilac sun-bonnet which she would never wear again.

I stole away with dim eyes, and late though it was for a long walk, started straight off to the Dart.

It was a dark, still evening with low, gray clouds, and even under the talkative trees there was a hush, which presaged coming storm. How my woods have altered since that golden day in May when the wild hyacinths flowed, a sea of amethyst, around the tree roots, and sun and shadow played among their trunks.

Gold, russet, fawn, brown, and blue-black in the gathering gloom of twilight: I walked and walked through this rich, sombre, dying,

silent world of wood, with the little river leaping beside me.

At last my straining ears caught the low, strange cry. I stood still under the trees. The rich, damp odour of decaying vegetation filled my nostrils, and it was all so still that I could hear my own heart beating in response to the cry of the Dart. Deep called unto deep.

When I came out on her banks at last, she had no smile, no look for me. Black, sullen, inscrutable, she slipped on, wailing to herself in that strange language which she has spoken since the days when the world was young. No man has ever understood her wordless tongue, yet she will speak it till she and men cease to be.

I stood fascinated, and as I watched, behind a group of firs, the clouds suddenly opened to let one long, quivering finger of light touch the stark stems with rust-red. But there was not one ray or ripple on the river's black bosom. Golden foliaged trees bent to her brink, but she would have none of them. The only shadow that she would deign to reflect was that from a low bough of mountain ash which flung a stain, scarlet like blood, on the heaving, ruffled water. Still I watched. The pool of red quivered, widened out in broken

splashes, flowed together again, and then disappeared, as though sucked down by the hungry stream. The Dart and I have a secret too, known to the same one alone.

It was dark when I reached home, and never shall I forget that long, lonely walk through the black woods with the owls shrieking to and fro in the boughs, sometimes close above my shrinking head.

I found a message waiting for me, asking if I would go to Jenny again, as Granny was really dying.

Without stopping for food, I hurried on, reached the cottage and found Jenny surrounded by two or three sympathising neighbours, all in the kitchen.

"How is this?" I asked, somewhat sternly. "Why are you not with her?"

"Oh, Miss Beatrice, us be waiting for nurse or you," sobbed Jenny. "Us be 'fraid of death. Her waked up after you was gone, and asked for a light when there was one in the room. Then her had a kind of fit like, and us was so frit, us runned out. Hers been quiet since. Us can hear every sound."

"You miserable cowards," I could not help saying, as I started towards the staircase. "How would you like to be left alone, just at your time of worst need?"

It was quite useless. They were young women, all of them, who had never seen death in their lives, and their fear of it was perfectly overpowering. It had reduced them to the merest unreasoning animals. They stood, huddled together, shaking and listening for a sound from the room above.

I flew quietly upstairs and entered the little white room once more. It was lighted by a night-light in a daffodil-yellow stand. But one was there before me—a great angel, strong, loving, kind. Granny had not been left alone.

She lay there in the double bed, perfectly composed, and the fit, if fit it had been, must have been brief. Her head was turned to the middle of the bed and one gnarled hand—the one wearing the thread-thin wedding ring—was outstretched at arm's length across the mattress.

Granny had felt for her husband for the last time and not in vain.

She has found him.

We have made her ready for her long, long, golden wedding-day. We have clasped her hands over her breast and placed her mother's half-finished little cap on her head, as she asked that we should.

More than forty years ago it was laid down,



incomplete. Now it goes with Granny, never again to be seen by mortal eye, into the clean, sweet earth of Dartmoor. How wise they are, these bodies of ours, to travel to heaven by way of earth in whose fruitful bosom lie hid so many countless manifestations of love, the immortal.

So she lies, with folded hands and a faint little smile of contentment ; for, as she herself said, the last time I ever heard her speak, the Lord is kind and, for certain, He had a mind on her right to the end.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE OLD WILL

**J**ENNY and Will are to be married to-morrow. I have been to see Jenny in the re-arranged home to-day.

Granny's death, of course, righted the quarrel. Will, like an honest man, hastened to console his sweetheart and then, there being no further cause for delay, rather the contrary, in fact, he took the lonely maiden to himself. Granny's little annuity died with her, so Jenny would have had to seek employment, and Will wisely thought this not worth while. He took on the lease of the cottage, so Jenny has not even had to make ready a new house for her bridal. The little place has been painted and whitewashed, and Will's household gods are safely there.

It has all worked out most beautifully. As a farm labourer, Will earns, at full wages, eighteen shillings a week, with more in harvest time and less in bad weather. And the Dartmoor peasant, not to mention the farmer

too, has many advantages. There is not a person in the place who can possibly be called poor. They admit this themselves.

The cottages are rented at two shillings or half a crown a week, and this includes a good little vegetable garden, a pig's house, and wood linhay. There are always two bedrooms, sometimes three, and usually two downstairs rooms, a kitchen and parlour, or, at least, a kitchen and wash-house.

And what pictures they are, these cottage homes, with their stone walls two feet thick, their casement windows, open chimneys, and thatched roofs ! They all have turbary rights, all being many generations old. These rights include free grazing for a pig, sometimes also for a cow and pony, and the right to cut seven hundred and fifty fags a year on the commons, which amount is an ample allowance of continuous firing for twelve months. Another right is that of cutting bracken for firing and bedding, and unlimited furze as small firewood.

Will, like the other men, will cut his tags in the evening after work, and thus his firing will cost him nothing. Further, as is the custom, he is allowed a horse and cart, free, for one day by his master, and also a certain

portion of his master's land wherein to grow potatoes free of charge. He gets a pint of milk a day free, and frequent gifts of food and vegetables. So, even though Will is only a farm labourer, Jenny's married life promises peace and security.

Of course, in continuously bad weather the farmers cannot always give work, but they are, most of them, generous, and do their best to make work for men who want it. Thank goodness, we have no loafers here. On Dartmoor, if a man wants to live, he has got to work. There is no charity. Consequently, the people are independent and self-supporting. Though leisurely in their methods, they are extremely hard-working, and amazingly punctual. Some are hard drinkers, but they are equally hard workers. The least sober never miss work through the drink, and however "market merry" they may be overnight, they are always up to time in the morning. A man who is "as drunk as a lord" at ten p.m. is at his post at half-past seven next morning, as if nothing had happened overnight. They have their faults, but they are a fine race and they live up to their own peculiar standard. As a whole, they are sober, and their gratitude for work is amazing. Their main desire in life is work,

and when they get it they do it punctually and quickly.

By the way, since beginning this book, we have discovered a sober thatcher. He is even now at work on a shippen roof.

I always dread the advent of any rich and so-called charitable resident here, who might spoil their sturdy, self-respecting independence.

Will has brought his bride some pathetic old relics in the way of furniture, things which have been generations in his family. Among them is his father's will, one of the quaintest, most touching documents I have ever read. The dear, simple old man, for some unaccountable reason, indulged in a majestic parchment document two folio pages long, drawn up by a lawyer in full legal form. And when it is all done, how very little he had to leave . . . beyond his honest faith and two or three humble relics. Jenny allowed me to copy part of it and I reproduce it.

"In the name of God. Amen."

That is how it begins. One would imagine that "Amen" ought to end it. Quite the contrary. Then it continues:

"I, Caleb Willcox, being weak of body but of sound mind and perfect memory do make

my last will and testament as follows. I give and recommend my soul into the hands of God Almighty, my Creator. And my Body I recommend to the earth to be buried in Christianlike and decent manner."

I call that exquisite. It is poetry, mysticism, for a man to bequeath his soul by a legal deed to God, and his body to Mother Earth. Then he goes on:

"And as touching such temporal estate as God hath been pleased to bestow upon me I give bequeathe and dispose thereof in manner and form as following that is to say, I give and bequeathe unto William Willcox, to Mary Willcox and to John Willcox to my three eldest children——"

What? Something very important after this portentous preamble? No.

"—the articles of furniture belonging to my former wife. I also give to my two daughters Mary and Susan, a room now occupied by Mary at the back part of the house, with two yards of garden adjoining the said room for their exclusive use during the period they remain unmarried paying the executor the low rent of four pence per week. And further that Mary have the cupboard adjoining the



clock in the kitchen and Susan the bell metal skillett."

Wise old man! A man who cared for all things, great and small, from his own immortal soul down to a bell metal skillett and a kitchen cupboard, because each and all had been bestowed upon him by God.

Susan died unmarried, and, just before her premature death, gave the skillett to her brother Will, so it is now jointly Jenny's.

The will is witnessed by a man with a trade I never before met, that of "cordwainer." I must ask Mr. Coombe or someone what is a cordwainer. The residue of the old man's property, whatever that may have been, was left to his wife.

When I left them this evening, it was cold, chill, wind-racked twilight—a typical evening of late October, and, as I often do on specially cheerless days, I went round the farmyard before going in to my tea-table beside the peat fire.

First, the cow shippen, where seven beautiful red Devons were munching furiously, preparatory to milking. Each was standing in her stall, with the chain necklace round her

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massive throat. They are splendid beasts, the red Devons, with their long, thick bodies, fine little legs and hoofs, and bull-like necks, full of delicious creases. Their breathing is like the sound of mighty bellows. I suppose there is no creature which makes the noise in breathing that a cow does. In the special pen or crib were two new-born calves, red, clean, guileless, without even the tiniest buds of horns. In winter, when the cattle are out on the moor, they are so exactly the colour of the bracken that you cannot tell their whereabouts till you see the gleam of their ivory-white horns.

Two sleek cats sat sedately on the ladder leading up to the hay tallat, keeping keen amber eyes open for rats.

Next, the stable where the cob and Violet were assiduously supping off oats. Ben and the Tweed Dog sleep in the stable. They both greeted me with rapture. The Tweed Dog is so devoted to the cob that, in summer, she breaks out of the empty stable to seek her equine friend in the field, and sleeps all night with him in the open.

Then the calves' house where the older beasties live, and next to them, the bullock shippen, longest and finest of the buildings,

housing its double row of handsome red steers. In the higher corner are two hen-coops, each containing a fat, yellow feathered mother sitting on fifteen tiny silken chicks just hatched.

After that, the fowl-house proper. I always enter with reverence, for I have a sneaking idea that the cock may resent my intrusion into his harem, and I depart abruptly at the sound of inquiring clucks.

Last, the pigs. The sheep, of course, are never indoors at any time of year. They even lamb in the open, without the slightest protection. The new-born lambs are dropped on snow sometimes, but it never appears to hurt them. The wind may be tempered to the shorn lamb; it never is to the new-born.

Thus ends my tour, and I stand again in the court, which is surrounded on its four sides by the low, thatched buildings all sheltering some form of warm, well-fed, thriving life, surmounted by the lofts which store the food-stuffs and flanked by the great root house and a row of precious ricks.

I often stand there, after seeing the life and plenty, while my thoughts fly to the cold, hungry, homeless outcasts on the Embankment of London. I would give much if they could

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all be as warm, well-fed, and well-housed as our animals on Dartmoor.

Then with useless tears in my eyes and an aching heart, I come in to tea.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE STORM

ONE would have expected Jenny's wedding to be a pastoral idyll of the quietest, homeliest kind. The wedding itself was, indeed, but the day ended in a scene of dramatic, almost tragic intensity, with which even nature was in harmony.

The marriage was at noon, but, as is usually the case here, the feast was not until evening, when people are at leisure.

With a child-like generosity, the bride invited me to the feast and even asked me to take one end of the table, if I would "not be offended." It would be such an honour, she explained, to have one of the gentry with them. But for Miss Beatrice, she would never have come to her senses or been blessed with a husband.

I was overcome at the poor girl's exaggerated opinion of me and my feeble efforts. I assured her, truly, that it was a very high honour to receive such an invitation. And

there I stopped short in a quandary. I understood that my presence might possibly have been unmixed pleasure to Jenny herself, but I felt sure I should be a restraint upon the guests. The mixing of classes upon such a family occasion would not have been a successful mixture at all. It was not like an occasion of public festivities. After deep thought, I steered my way between offending Jenny and being a nuisance to the guests by pleading a really plausible engagement for the hour of the feast itself. Then I followed up my excuse by a promise to go in for the gossip afterwards. And this I did.

It was a tempestuous evening. As I walked down to the cottage, the wind was moaning in gusts across an ominous calm, and the bells rose and fell fitfully on the troubled air. A lead-coloured pall covered the sky, upon whose gray bosom lay a froth of white—that sure sign of thunder which is the first foaming from the mouth of the storm. On Dartmoor, when you see a leaden sky, streaked with separate and lower layers of frothy cloud, remain not too far from shelter. Those insignificant lines of white are far more dangerous than the duskiest thunder cloud.

When I reached the cottage, I found them all in the upper room where dear old Granny



passed so many of her declining days. It is the biggest room in the house, extending, as it does, over some of the outbuildings, and is large enough for a dance.

Heavy splashes of rain began to fall before I reached the door, and the threatening storm seemed, in a curious way, to be reflected in humanity.

For a wedding party, they were strangely quiet. As I mounted the stairs, I could hear only an occasional remark instead of a loud and merry buzz of chatter.

My entrance caused a momentary stir. Jenny and Will came forward to greet me, and all such men as were seated rose to offer me their chairs. After congratulations to the bride, I accepted a seat near Mr. Coombe in a quiet corner.

Old Wilde was there, obviously in an excitable state. George and Thirza were close to the fireplace, she sitting and he standing behind her chair. Will was trying to elicit some of his usual racy flow of conversation from old Wilde, while Jenny talked apart with Avis, whose one supreme hope is now more probable than ever, unless another untimelier tragedy should entirely wreck her shadowed life.

I could not help watching the two, the

young widow soon to be a mother, and the newly-married maid. Jenny has been loyal and honourable in the extreme. She has never even hinted at Edwin's infidelity or suggested that he and she were once plighted lovers. Poor Avis is left to cherish her ideal and to hope with hungry intensity that her babe will be a boy, with his father's eyes.

The two women conversed softly over in Granny's corner near her empty chair which no one uses now. Jenny looked really beautiful in cream colour just the tone of her ivory skin.

Avis was, of course, in black, which was the best foil for her fair skin and golden hair.

Suddenly came the first flash of lightning. All ceased speaking to listen instinctively for the roll of thunder to follow.

"A long ways off yet," murmured Avis, after the angry rumble had subsided. "'Tis to be hoped it'll bide there."

Thirza glanced round at George, then anxiously at her sister, but said nothing.

Another flash came, with startling rapidity. The wind had risen and was wailing round the cottage, driving sheets of rain against the windows. The storm was travelling fast.

Then the tramp of feet echoed up from the

road, and, a few minutes later, four men came into the room.

"Us have come for a mug o' zider," said the leader, with a leer. "A storm be coming, and the church tower, hers a wisht old place when the lightning be 'bout. Zeed 'en once, running down the conductors like red-hot water, and once was enough for I. Us'll bide till it be over."

The newcomers were the ringers. Always, on wedding-days, their work is abandoned and they ring at intervals till late at night.

Two had apparently remained behind at the inn, and the other four were given chairs and mugs of cider.

The lightning became almost continuous, but the four heeded not. Jests and plain-spoken congratulations rattled from them in volleys.

Avis shrank back into her corner till she was unnoticeable in the dark room, and Jenny left her side to light a couple of lamps which, however, did not serve to outshine the lightning and only turned its anger from white to green by contrast.

"Us'll be ringing for another wedding by Christmas, I reckon," said the captain, rising to hit George on the back. "'Tis to be hoped us won't have to toll the death dole for 'ee a

few weeks later, same as us did for the last."

A horrified silence reigned after this ill-timed speech. Thirza turned pale with disgust, George's eyes flashed ominously, and Avis shrank still further against the wall, turning away her head.

Suddenly old Wilde burst out. Drink, old memories; and the effect of the storm upon an already overwrought nervous system produced an extraordinary effect.

"Reckon 'ee will then," he almost shrieked. "So long as men be such blasted fools as to listen to ill-wished maids. 'Tis a mystery to me what they see in 'en. My poor boy 'd a been living now but for that——"

He broke off in an inarticulate splutter. With two strides George had gained his side and laid a fierce grip on his throat.

"Say one more word, you smutty-mouthed toad, and I'll choke the life out of you," he hissed, white with fury.

Mr. Coombe got up quickly, but three ringers forestalled him and plucked George off by main force. He recovered his self-control by an obvious and mighty effort and returned to reassure Thirza.

"Gi' I some more cider, for the Lord's sake," gurgled old Wilde. "I be stiffeled.

'Tis come to something if a man can't say what he's a mind to, without being stiffeled."

Suddenly Mr. Coombe came to the front. Everyone stared at him amazed. It was the first time he had been so moved. His face was white under its sunburn and the brown hands were trembling like a woman's.

"If you'd say it in a proper manner, us would agree with 'ee," he said, his voice shaking. "Do 'ee think as I don't feel the same to see my son, my only son, going to his death because he be too stiff-necked to hearken to his old father?"

The silence became tense. George stared at his father with utter amazement.

"How many times have I prayed the Lord to bring he to his senses and stop the thing 'fore it gets too late? But I might so well have prayed to a stone wall. The Lord will let a stiff-necked man go to his own ruin."

At this moment Avis rose and crept softly out of the room. I saw the gleam of tears as she went. Jenny followed her, and, in passing, gave one look at old Wilde which made even him cower.

Mr. Coombe did not appear to notice the two girls. He was entirely absorbed in his sorrow.

It was a strange scene. For the first time

an opinion was elicited from, or offered by, the two fathers. Till now, no one had ever known what old Wilde thought or what Mr. Coombe felt. The effect of the first sight of these hidden depths was paralysing.

"Might so well pray to a stone wall," repeated Mr. Coombe. "What can the Lord A'mighty Hissself do against childer that defy their parents?"

Wilde groaned and hid his face in his cider mug. There was a pause, which was captured by the storm. A blaze of lightning and a simultaneous crash of thunder silenced mere human voices.

"Lord 'a mercy, but that be near—just over us," muttered Wilde, turning away from the uncurtained window.

Suddenly George spoke. He was apparently oblivious of the storm.

"What can the Lord Almighty do against childer that defy their parents?" he echoed hoarsely. "He can reward them for minding He and His words before any earthly father's. 'Tis wrote in the Bible, 'A man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife.' *Leave* his father and mother——"

He was interrupted by a flash and a roar that made the room tremble. Whether, in the midst of his absorption, he noticed the



possible danger before we did, or whether his action was merely instinctive, I do not know, but he suddenly sprang at Thirza, who was still seated beside the fireplace, and seizing her, chair and all, whirled her away just as the iron grate fell clattering forward on the hearthstone, followed by a harmless shower of soot and plaster and a powerful smell of sulphur.

There was a moment's horrified silence. Then old Wilde jumped up, gibbering incoherently, and made for the door.

"House is struck, house is struck," he whimpered. "'Tis a judgment on the man who was quoting scripture so disrespectful."

"Ay, so 'tis," interrupted Mr. Coombe, wiping his brow. "Take warning, George, 'fore it be too late. As you was a-throwing they Bible words in your old father's teeth, the Lord's warning fell on 'ee."

George burst out into a fit of laughter not good to hear.

"You'm poor fules, all of 'ee," he shouted, pointing to the heap of harmless soot and plaster in the grate. "If the Lord had meant to harm Thirza, He'd ha' made a better shot nor that. 'Tis just contrary to what you say: 'tis to show that no storm can hurt her or me while we stick to what is right. If the

Lord had a spoken, He couldn't ha' said it plainer."

The retort was so swift that Mr. Coombe stared at his son, speechless, in a silence that was broken only by the shuffling footsteps and incoherent mutterings of old Wilde receding down the stairs.

Thirza rose, with the mien of an empress. She turned to George, and took his right hand in hers. Then, so standing, she faced us.

"George is right," she said proudly. "The Lord Almighty hath shown us our way to-night clearer than ever. And I baint proud of any one of you that calls yourself men to ha' talked as 'ee have this night 'fore me and Avis. My man is worth the whole lot of 'ee put together and it's him I'll cleave to, as the Bible saith, till death do us part. Come, George, us'll be going. 'Tis no company for you and I. I'd rather be out in God's storm nor sheltering in here with such company. Come 'long."

Still with the same haughty dignity she walked across the room, George beside her. We heard them swiftly descend the stairs and pass out into the angry night. I darted to one window and saw them clearly defined in the square of light that shone on the wet road through the uncurtained kitchen window

below. Thence they passed alone into the impenetrable darkness beyond.

From that minute the storm ceased. That last terrible outburst was the end of it. I managed to whisper a few comforting words to Avis and Jenny, then escaped home, glad to be quiet.

It is grievous, such a stormy ending to a good girl's wedding-day. And the vision of the fathers' hearts was grievous too. It is all so much sadder even than I thought. Yet it was worth it, for eliciting from George and Thirza their magnificent defiance of human opinion. Blindly and doggedly I still believe that such faith and such courage must be rewarded in the end. But I shall never forget seeing them walk out alone into the shelter and protection and the darkness of the storm.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE MARRIAGE OF GEORGE AND THIRZA

**A**NOTHER month has carried us to fulfilment. It is the eve of Christmas eve, and to-morrow is their wedding-day. All things are steeped in the season's peace. The weather is marvellous, and the moor a glory of russet and blue distances, of pearl, opal, gold, and faded amethyst. It is summer and winter in one.

To-day I went to the Dart for the last time this year. The woods are utterly naked, except for the evergreen and orange of fir and larch. I set forth in the early afternoon, in bright sunshine which had melted the hoar frost.

At one point the bare woods are mostly young oak-trees that have been barked, and now that the veil of leaf is gone, the deep, sheer valley of the Webburn is visible through the branches. At another point, high above the water, there is a clearing and one can see miles of woods clinging like mist to the deep

velvet-brown hillsides, at the farthest limit of vision. Near to, the trees are a study in ivory, frosted silver, and black pearl colour. The barked trunks and the boughs crusted with gray lichen and white hoar frost make a marvellous colour effect against the rich dark hills. There is no green, no russet, no yellow. It is acres of silver-gray and black pearl, so soft, so delicate, so fine that the dainty tracery of bough and twig melts, in perspective, to smoke or mist.

I reached the Dart at sunset, and saw a sight: sunlight and moonlight on the water at the same time. The sunset of rose-coloured fire which foretells coming snow mingled with the white of her western rapids till light and foam together made a rain of rose and white. A little lower, the flood widened into a broad brown stream on whose rippling bosom lay the pale gold moonlight. The wonder lasted only ten minutes. Probably never in a lifetime shall I see it again.

There, too, was peace ineffable.

I came home another way so as to strike the moor. It was a long climb through more miles of other woods till at last I reached the gate at the top and stepped out into the open. It was so still that not a tendril of my hair was stirred. There was not one sound in all those

miles of moor and sky. Round the moon was a huge ring, a lunar halo wedding her with the earth. In the distant valley, the houses themselves were not visible, but through their uncurtained windows the lights shone from every hillside—the great gold stars of home.

I thought of George, sleeping for the last time under his father's roof, and of Thirza in the cottage near the black plantation. Now they are five miles apart. To-morrow night another light will be kindled on the moor between here and Bellever, the fire and lamp of their new home. To-morrow night they will be man and wife alone together beside their own hearth fire.

O blessed poverty! O happy simplicity! Think of this ideal wedding where husband and wife go home alone together, without even one servant to desecrate their perfect happiness. Think how they will turn the key upon all intruders, how she will kindle the fire, and with her own hands prepare their first meal.

No wonder working people love one another. For them, love is not strangled at its very birth by conventions, or poisoned by civilisation.

It is over. They are man and wife, for



better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do them part. Death may be near or far. Who knows? One thing we know, which is that love is with them for ever.

There was nothing to mar the beauty of the ceremony. The bride was in silver-gray, the colour of my woods of yesterday. She wore a pretty white hat, white gloves and a little buttonhole of Christmas rosebuds in the bosom of her frock.

There was no bridesmaid. Avis was there, radiant with the hope which is to be fulfilled in March. Jenny and Will were there, placid and prosperous. Mr. Coombe was there, looking a picture in his best things. Sunday clothes here are not garments of hideousness. They are suitable, handsome, expensive, and enhance the good looks of our handsome moor men. George in his well-cut navy-blue suit, with the white buttonhole, was the picture of what he is—a healthy, temperate, hard-working Dartmoor farmer with generations of honest blood in his veins.

There was no talking or whispering or giggling anywhere in the church. The calm dignity of bride and groom, their utter lack of self-consciousness, would have adorned a duke and duchess. They looked not merely

well bred but noble. They took no more notice of anyone in the church than if it had been empty. They made no mistake, required no prompting in the course of the service.

There was a long pause in the vestry afterwards, then when they emerged and walked, still with the same silent dignity, side by side, down the aisle, the bells pealed out to tell the hills of the happy ending to a troubled love story.

The ringers kept it up all day and far into the night. George and Thirza are both vastly popular, and partly for this reason, partly because it is Christmas eve, we have had the bells at intervals until nearly ten o'clock to-night.

At nine, I caused our yule log to be lighted. This is presented every Christmas eve by the head tenant. It is a huge ashen faggot, so heavy that on'y a man can lift it. Its interior is large logs, which are skilfully enveloped in the finer branches of twigs the whole being bound with twisted beams of twig. According to the old Dartmoor custom, one ought to drink a quart of cider every time a beam bursts in the burning, and canny labourers, in preparing the log, put as many beams as they think the maister will tolerate. I need hardly say that we do not indulge in

this part of the custom. But I dearly love the yule faggot, and would not miss it for a kingdom. It is always of green ash, which burns fiercely. Nature is kind to give us, in this wet country, a tree which is so common, so plentiful, and which will burn, if we are hard put to it for firing, the very day it is cut down. There is an old couplet which tells that

A fire of ash, green,  
Is fit for a queen.

According to Scandinavian legends, the ash is the tree of life.

Sitting alone by the light and heat of the yule log, I thought deep thoughts. I was sitting beside the fire on this same hearth, nine months ago, when I began this, my book. It rose, phoenix-like, from the ashes of Lady Agatha, and now, on this night of the most significant fire of all the year, it is all but finished. It would scarcely be honest to say that I have written it. It would be far truer to say that it has written itself. Where it has led, I have followed to record with becoming meekness. Of my own power I could not have conceived it, and I feel sad that its beauty should be marred and enfeebled by its interpreter.

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The most momentous chapter still remains to be written, and for this I must await the future. Time alone can finish the story, and not till George and Thirza have kept their first wedding-day shall we know the end.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE PRIEST OF LOVE

**A**LREADY it seems as if a glimmer of dawn were visible on the black horizon of mystery. Yet perhaps I ought not to put it so definitely, for I have hardly one fact to support me. They say a woman has the power of intuition which is a higher gift than reason, and, certainly, this premonition is intuition or nothing. Yet it is not easy to distinguish intuition from nerves.

However, I will record the curious interview of this afternoon. I am writing this year of the story as it develops, and I shall record anything that seems to bear on it. Then, from the end, we can look "back along" and see if the tapestry woven in the dark has indeed contained throughout the threads of the lovers' lives.

It is the night of New Year's day. This afternoon I was on Dream Tor, looking across to Bellever and thinking much of the new-wed lovers. It is extraordinary weather for

January : still, clear, golden, mild. The moor is a glory of gold, red, and russet. Even now, in the heart of winter, we can still see where the summer kisses of the sun have touched the face of the moor.

As I sat brooding, looking down at the distant blue lowlands and the opal sea, suddenly something moved among the boulders, a short distance from the tor. With a thrill of delight, I recognised Preacher John.

I had almost forgotten his existence, for I have not seen him since early June, and, since then, my mind has been so absorbed with the unusual happenings here that memory let go of this strange, erratic, lonely being who comes and goes as fitfully as the sheet lightning which we see, winter and summer, on the moor.

At first, I was truly glad to see him. I had learnt so much about love since last he flashed across my path, and, as I have before said, love is his monomania.

As usual, I went to greet him, then invited him to stay and talk with me.

"Where have you been and where are you going?" I asked, as he obediently sat down on a boulder and turned his transparent face to the sun. "Why haven't we seen you for so many ages?"



"All the dry weather I was visiting the other side of the moor, the part around Post Bridge and Cranmere which is now impassable. When the autumn rains have filled the bogs again, I haunt Graystone," he answered, smiling.

"I hope you will really haunt us for a time," I pleaded. "I have a strange feeling that you are needed here. Anyway, I need you. My mother is away, remember, on her year's tour, and there are still several months of it to run. I am here alone and I want to talk to one of my betters."

He flashed a whimsical glance at me. "Your betters don't live in huts on the moor, Miss Beatrice, or go about clothed in sheep-skins."

"If I say they do, they do. A woman's word on any subject must be the last, remember. Come, listen to me. Have you heard the strange things which have been happening here for several generations? Did you hear of young Wilde's awful death on the moor in June? You can see the place from here," I said, rising to point.

"No, I have heard nothing. I never see a newspaper, and rarely any human being, especially in summer. When I returned in autumn to more populated haunts, possibly the excitement had fizzled out. Tell me."

So I told him. It took a long time. I began with finding Thirza at Jay's grave, and ended with the two marriages.

He did not interrupt me by one word from start to finish, but at several parts he seemed extraordinarily moved, so moved indeed that I almost faltered in my narrative, thinking it was something more than average interest in a vivid story. As I proceeded, gradually there grew in me an uncanny feeling that this strange old man knew something about the mystery.

Even while I was still talking, one side of my brain reasoned with myself that it was nerves, or that I was, not unnaturally, connecting together two mysteries: this incomprehensible old man and an equally incomprehensible spell. When I ceased at last, he was gazing at me with a look before which reason fled afraid. It was the rapt gaze of a seer, and he stared at me, through me, even, I felt, like one who sees a vision reflected upon some unconscious object in nature.

It was obvious that he did not see me, but some image of his own mind.

The silence was tense and painful. I am ashamed to confess it, but I began to feel really frightened. The successive tragedies, coupled with that oppressive sense of lurking

evil, have been enough to weaken the stoutest nerves. Then I am only a woman, and I was alone with the strangest of men in desolate country.

At last I could endure it no longer. With the courage of fear, I stepped forward to lay a trembling hand on his arm.

"What is it? You are frightening me," I faltered. "Do you see something, or do you know something? Do speak."

In an instant his face relaxed and he turned to me with tender solicitude. I had used what was, to his gentle and exquisitely considerate nature, a most powerful weapon.

"Forgive me, dear lady," he said, taking my cold hand between his, which were, as usual, warm. "I would not frighten even the most timid bird, still less a woman. But bear with me yet a little longer if I ask to be allowed to think over your remarkable story in silence."

He dropped my hand, and moved away a few paces, with his profile towards me. The sun was descending to his golden bed-chamber behind the southern moor, and I saw the rapt look come again into the old man's face as the glow suffused it.

At last he spoke, slowly at first, then with growing fire and emotion.

“ Yes, as you say, Miss Beatrice, we shall know their end in a year’s time. They have married purely for love. They have considered love only and they have thought it worth the risk. They are ready to risk even certain death rather than miss love. If they have been man and wife, to them nothing else matters. O Love, I thank you with all my soul that you should have claimed two such subjects for your kingdom. They have dared to love and they will dare to the end. Only those who love know the courage that love requires. These have it. It is love indeed. In a year we shall see the end, and I shall just live to witness it.”

He paused, leaving me very far from reassured.

“ What do you mean ? ” I asked. “ Do you think you will die by the end of this year ? Surely you don’t imply that you have any connection with this strange mystery ? ”

“ No, no,” he answered, turning again to me, with an air of utter calm succeeding to his eager emotion. “ I have no connection with the mystery. But I know that I shall die next Christmas, and shall only just live to see the end.”

He smiled down at my terrified face, for I

was more frightened then than I had been before.

"Miss Beatrice, I am utterly ashamed of myself this evening. I have given you fright after fright. You see better now why I seldom visit the haunts of men. I am only fit to dwell apart in my own world. The mystic, the supernatural, is so disquieting to normal lives. To me it is the natural, the normal; but that is not for all.

"How do I know that I am going to die upon a given day, you long to ask me? How can I explain? I *know*. But it will soon be dusk and you have a rough piece of moor to traverse between here and home. Good-night, my child, and forget anything I have said that disturbs you. Remember only to love all your life, in sunshine, in darkness, and in storm. If you are ever disappointed, betrayed, wounded, outcast, love on."

I had, perforce, to accept my dismissal. It was true what he said about the track, and I did not want to risk a sprained ankle. Moreover, I was hatefully glad to escape. I was really quite unnerved by the interview.

How little I have to go upon to explain my premonition. Nothing except that a strange old man, who is admittedly "soft," became rapt in trance-like thought at the story and

subsequently uttered a wild prophecy concerning his own death. Yet, reason as I may, the conviction remains that as I stood there near him, he was looking, with his mental vision, at something, past or future, which is the solution.

There! I have written it. We shall be able to look back and see if I am right or wrong.



## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE CHAMBER OF LIFE

**T**HIS, my next entry, is four months later. By the end of March poor Avis's hope was no longer faith or hope, but sight.

Her child is safe—a boy, with his father's eyes.

As usual, it was all over before we could hear even that she was taken ill. The news was brought back by the outgoing postman in the middle of the morning.

“A fine boy and both doing well.”

Immediately, I packed my luncheon satchel and set out by the moor route.

It was a genuine March day, when the air is like iced champagne and the sunshine as delicate a gold.

The pungent smoke from the swaling fires of the previous night still lingered, here and there, in wreaths around the dusky brows of the tors, while the great distances melted into

the haze of east wind and made the land indistinguishable from sky.

From the farmsteads in the valley rose the shrill bleating of countless happy lambs.

I stayed under Hound Tor for lunch, then continued my way past the desolate grave and through the dark plantation. The little white cottage was steeped in sunshine, and from an upper room I heard the lusty cry of an infant—gladder music than any of the other glad voices of earth that day.

The cottage door stood open, so I walked in and up the white stairs.

As I have explained, visitors to proud new mothers are allowed at once and indiscriminately, so I was sure of my welcome.

Thirza met me on the little landing and flushed crimson with delight.

“Oh, you dear thing!” I exclaimed, hugging her. “I have heard the news and come over at once. Thank God, thank God they are both safe.”

“Yes, thank God,” she answered, with a sob. “Oh, Miss Beatrice, I shall never forget this night. They sent for me to come over, when it was 'bout ten o'clock, and I couldn't leave her.”

“But, surely, you weren't alone with her?” I interrupted.

"Ah no. Mrs. West, her was here long 'fore I comed over. But 'tis the first time I was ever near such a thing. I baint used to it like, and I were some frit. But Mrs. West, her said I was a proper silly, and her was having a fine time, sure 'nough. 'Tis a lovely l'il baby, Miss Beatrice: such a lot of hair, and dinky little hands and feet, and poor Edwin's eyes already."

I went into the chamber of life. Avis was lying down, with her fair hair streaming over her pillow and her pretty face flushed with excitement. Mrs. West sat beside her, knitting. At the sight of me she rose, beaming showers of welcomes.

"May I come in?" I asked politely. "I don't want to be selfish and upset the patient."

"Oh, my dear life, you'm not gwain to upsot her, Miss Beatrice," exclaimed the good dame. "You'm so welcome as flowers in May. Sit down, my dear, do 'ee now, and have a tell while I run down and make some gruel."

The dear soul bustled out and I pounced joyfully on her vacated chair.

"Oh Avis, Avis, you lucky girl," I began, turning down the bedclothes gently till I saw the little downy head nestling on her arm. "What a beauty! Aren't you glad?"

She turned up her flushed face, but her lips were quivering.

"Glad baint the word for it, I reckon. And I be some sorry too." She broke off, choked with a sob.

"You mean because your husband can't see baby?" I asked gently.

She nodded, and rolling over, buried her face in the pillow.

"I know, you poor darling. It is hard. But you mustn't look at it in that light. Your husband can and does see him and you. He is with you now, rejoicing, nearer to you really than when he was alive in the ordinary way. Then he had to leave you. Now he never does."

She turned over again, and raised herself on one elbow.

"Do 'ee really b'leeve that, Miss Beatrice?" she asked earnestly.

"Of course."

"So do I," she answered, with a great sigh. "I wondered if 'twas just that I was fanciful like, as women be sometimes when they'm carrying. But times, I've felt 'en close to me, like my guardian angel. Do 'ee think God would let 'en come to me, like that, all the way from heaven?"

"Silly child!" I answered cheerfully. "All

the way from heaven! Pray, how far is heaven away from earth? "

She eyed me dubiously.

" Don't know, for certain."

" Neither does anyone," I said, laughing. " But you may be quite certain it's very near, much, much nearer than we most of us think. The proper home of the angels is heaven. Yet the guardian angels live on earth close to each one of us, and they couldn't do that if earth were an unfit place for them. So we may be sure heaven is as near as our guardian angel is to us. And it would be just God's kind way to let your husband be the guardian angel of his own child."

Her eyes grew round and shining at this idea.

" Oh, Miss Beatrice," she gasped, " do 'ee think so? 'Twould be lovely if baby could have his own father for his guardian angel."

" Of course I think so," I answered very gravely. " Each new-born child has a newly appointed angel at its birth, and what is more likely than that a dead father or mother or brother or sister should be given the glorious work of protecting it through life in preference to the other beautiful things that they do in heaven? "

She lay still for some time, in a trance of happiness. I did not interrupt her.

“ ’Tis wonnerful,” she said at last, with another great sigh. “ Reckon I’d most rather have Edwin like that than as ’twas, back along. He’m so safe hisself, for one thing, and ’tis lovely to think he can never be parted like from baby all his life long.”

After a time I left her, still radiant with the thought.

I was thankful to have hit, haphazard, upon an apparently solid comfort for her at a terribly trying time of conflicting joy and sorrow.

Downstairs Thirza came to me. I stared at her dissectingly. Now that I could see her face in repose, I noticed it had grown sterner, more set in expression.

“ I’ll walk back with ’ee to the road, Miss Beatrice,” she said, turning away from my scrutiny. “ Tiddn’t near tea-time yet, and Mrs. West, her don’t want me.”

“ Well, and how are you ? ” I asked, after we had fairly set out.

“ Oh, I don’t know,” she answered, almost with a groan. “ ’Tis hard to say. I reckon I’m a big coward, after all, Miss Beatrice, for I do dread to see George go ’way, mornings, to the fields, and market days I go with ’en





"THE PUNGENT SMOKE FROM THE SWALING FIRES."

*Photo by Beatrice Chase,  
taken with Kodak I.A.*



always. Can't bear to let 'en out of my sight, reelly. 'Tis silly, I know, but I feel as if my love could keep off the danger."

"So it can and so it will," I answered promptly. "I don't believe there is any evil on earth or in hell that love cannot conquer. But, Thirza dear, you are not obliged to be always beside him to guard him. If you don't go yourself, your love goes with him, like a shield always between him and harm. When we love anyone, part of our soul-self goes out to him to the other side of the world even, if need be. I mean it. Love is a real thing, as real as electricity, as real as the waves of ether which we can't see or handle, yet which can run round the world in a few seconds. Your love is keeping him safe, I am certain. Only don't feel obliged to be always with him, and close to him, because that is a strain for you, and it may make him think you are worrying."

To my utter amazement and embarrassment, suddenly she dropped on her knees in my path and began kissing my hands unrestrainedly.

"Oh, Miss Beatrice, you'm wonnerful!" she sobbed. "'Tis you saved my life and 'tis always you that keeps up my heart. Do 'ee think, for certain, that love be *real* like that?"

"Quite for certain," I answered, gently pulling her up on her feet and kissing her warmly. "Keep on loving and all will be well with George. God wants your love for him and He will use it as only He can."

I came home with a glad soul. It is so difficult to comfort. One dreads lest the wound may be too raw even for a would-be healing touch, and fears that the comforter may inflict worse pain.

For one day at least in life I have been guided to touch the right chords in the hearts of two suffering and innocent women.

I visited them constantly through April into May, until the anniversary of the day when I first met Thirza at Jay's grave.

Thirza had gone back to her own home long before this, but she had asked me to meet her at the grave that afternoon, for the sake of old memories. She still came frequently to visit her sister, and one day was almost as convenient as another for this.

I went, of course. She was there waiting for me, her face graver than ever.

"Seemeth like much more'n a year, don't it, Miss Beatrice?" she began with a sigh. "Well, us 'll know 'fore next May."

"Thirza," I said reproachfully, "you are worrying again. What is it?"

With a gesture of despair she dropped down on the rough mound and began to sob convulsively. I tried to comfort her, and at last learnt that she was to be a mother, though instead of consoling her this great fact had entirely broken her down. She was literally in a panic.

She was bravely hiding her terror from George, or thinking she was. But she seemed to connect her coming hope with his doom. Each young wife, she reminded me, had been in like case. It was as if life, new life, were bringing with it the angel of death.

"I could ha' beared it all till the year's end, but for this," she sobbed despairingly. "All along I said to myself, if I'm spared this, 'twill be a sign that he'm different to the others. This be always the sign. Now there be no difference whatever. 'Tis the last hope gone. Oh, George, why did I ever marry you, only to kill you, when I love 'ee so? 'Twould ha' been better if I'd a died here, when I tried to."

It was no use being too kind. She had utterly lost control of herself, and for a panic of fear a touch of tonic is necessary. I rose and spoke severely.

"Thirza, I am ashamed of you, utterly ashamed. Where is your gratitude to me for saving your life? You know what George

said about that. It would have broken his heart if you had died then. You are thinking too much about yourself again. Think of him. Don't think what you would like for him but what he would like for himself. Come, stand up, and stop crying. Do you hear me ? ”

I took her hands and slapped them soundly, as one would slap a naughty child's.

“ Get up, you great baby, and think of your husband,” I went on sharply. “ Thirza, do you hear me ? ”

Slowly she rose and stood before me, hanging her head and fingering the corner of her apron.

“ Think of George, I tell you. Now, answer me : if George were asked would he rather have given you up and got off with his life, or would he prefer to have been your husband and the father of your child, even if he dies this year, what would be his answer ? ”

She was silent a moment, more from emotion than from doubt.

“ Yes, I see,” she whispered huskily. “ Reckon you'm right as usual, Miss Beatrice. Only 'tis nervous work.”

“ I know it is, you poor darling,” I said, clasping her trembling figure to me. Having



achieved my victory, I could afford to pour balm on my victim's wounds.

"Of course it is frightfully nervous work. And the flesh is often weak, when the spirit is still willing. Don't pay any attention to these fits of blues, Thirza. When you feel them coming on, think of George's point of view at once, and that will put you right."

I left her comforted, but I came home with an aching heart.

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE LEGEND OF THE CURSE

THE end is peace.

In one form or another, I expected an extraordinary Christmas, and we have had it.

Early in the afternoon of Christmas Eve, I received a visit from a strange moorman who lives out in a hut near Preacher John's. This man had been sent, he said, to ask George, Thirza, and myself if we would go out and see Preacher John before the morrow.

The summons did not surprise me. In fact, I was expecting it. But it had surprised Thirza, I found, and had considerably agitated her. The moorman had called at George's farm on his way to me, so, when I arrived on ponyback, I found them almost ready to depart.

"Whatever do he want us for?" began Thirza nervously, after I had offered greetings. "Oh, Miss Beatrice, the year be so nearly out. Us might ha' been left alone, like, till

to-morrow. George have finished up and waddn't gwain out again. Now us have got to ride seven or eight mile, and perhaps come home along, after the dimpsey, and——"

"And the horse may put his foot in a rabbit hole and poor George may break his neck within a few hours of salvation," I finished cruelly. "Thirza, you're a real coward. Do you think that dear, good old man would have sent for us except for our good?"

She hung her head, abashed, but still trembling.

"No, fey, not if he could help of it; but——"

"But he knows more things of earth and heaven than we do, Thirza," I replied gravely. "We must trust him and go."

At that moment George appeared. He saluted me in his usual dignified way and thanked me for coming to go with them.

He helped his wife on to her pony and then sprang upon his own. I was surprised at the calm way in which he accepted the strange summons. No time was lost. He made no comment, even after we had set out. I wondered if the moorman had told him more than he had me.

Our way led, for a short time only, by the high road towards Bellever, then we branched

on to a moor track, George leading. By that time it was sunset, and we had several miles of roadless moor to traverse before reaching our haven. George led, I followed, and Thirza came last of all. We could have ridden abreast, for there was no bogland, but the heather scrub made it rougher going for both horse and rider, so it was better for each to keep to the tiny, smooth track.

The night was extraordinarily mild, with a complete absence of wind. It needed an act of faith in the calendar to believe that it was really Christmas eve. The utter stillness of the atmosphere made conversation easy. As soon as we were well under way, I began :

“ George, you take this very quietly. What message did the man bring you ? ”

He turned round on his pony's bare back to answer.

“ That Preacher John be dying, Miss Beatrice, and wanted to see us three afore he goes,” he replied gravely.

I gave a gasp. No such message had reached me. Then the old man had been right in what he prophesied on Dream Tor almost a year before. This was my first thought. Then followed a rush of regret, of pity for the utter desolation of such a death-bed, untended by one friend or kinsman.

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‘Oh, poor old man, how sorry I am,’ I exclaimed huskily. “Is he very ill? Have they sent for the doctor?”

“Can’t tell ’ee, Miss Beatrice. Bill didn’t say.”

We rode on for a time in silence, across the vast, dark waste, with our faces towards the afterglow in the west.

“Why do you think he wants to see us?” I asked, at last.

“Can’t tell ’ee that, neither,” answered George, with the flicker of a smile. “All I know is that I’ve never refoosed to go to a dying beast when they’ve axed me, so, for certain, I shouldn’t refoose a fellow crittur, and a man older’n my own father who never did aught but good to man, woman, and cheel.”

This, then, was the reason for this matter-of-fact and prompt response to the strange call. A man with no claim on him, but common humanity was dying and wanted him, so George must go.

Nothing more was said, after this, till we sighted the great ruined wall of the ancient encampment which had been roughly mended in places to form an enclosure for cattle. George led the way through one of the great gateways, and inside the huge circle we found

smaller circles of huts, two or three of which were rebuilt and inhabited by the moormen on those occasions when they were bringing in or taking away droves of cattle. It was one of these huts that Preacher John had, long before, taken for his own.

We dismounted, and George hitched the ponies' bridles to a stunted thorn tree which thrust its misshapen limbs defiantly above the low, broad wall.

My heart was beating wildly as we approached the little one-storied hut which held its living mystery.

A narrow opening in the granite wall served for a window, and through this emerged the red glow of a fire. Two or three heavy sheep-skins hung over the low doorway, before which George paused irresolute, while Thirza clung, terrified, to my arm.

"I hear you, good people. Come in," said a composed voice from the interior.

Reassured, George took a stride forward, lifted the sheep-skin, held it up while Thirza and I ducked under it, and then followed us into the hut.

It was just one large room, with a hearth fire against one wall, and a low bed opposite to it. There was a dresser with a few plain utensils on it, a table and two chairs. The



floor was dry, clean, hard earth, and the walls were rough stone, like the exterior.

But we had no time or thought for these details. Our whole attention was concentrated on the figure lying on the bed.

Yes, it was Preacher John, and he was dying. But if they had told me it was an angel of God, wearing the form of a man, I could have believed it easily. We had always noticed the transparency of his flesh and the light which shone not so much upon as through his face. Now, even with our dim bodily eyes, we could almost see the immortal soul piercing its way through the frail body.

This, then, was dying.

Without stopping to reflect, acting simply upon impulse, I walked across the uneven floor and knelt down close beside the bed. I was conscious of nothing but a strange desire to get inside this halo of light which emanated from him. Still without definite volition I put my hands into his and found them warm and supple.

He smiled at me, more with his starlike eyes than his white lips, then smiled at the other two, who were slowly advancing towards him.

"Good children to come," he said in low, even tones. "I was sure you would not ignore my message. It is an old man's last whim."

"But you are very ill?" I faltered, in a whisper. "Cannot we take you away and nurse you well again? Have you sent for the doctor?"

Again he smiled. "I am not ill, my child. I am only dying. Your sweet womanly solicitude is all awakened for me, of course. What should I do with doctor and nurse, when the Great Angel himself is waiting for me in the shadow so very near? Ah, if you could only understand how well, how well it is with me!"

I did understand. Dimly, yet very surely, I understood that I was watching not death but life, the triumph of immortality.

For sheer awe, the other two had gone quietly on their knees behind me. The old man did not appear to notice our attitude. He seemed glad to have our faces so near to his own, that was all.

The fire was a large one, composed entirely of the real black peat which we do not get on our side of the moor. This blazes first like wood, and then settles into tier upon tier of clear, absolutely red-hot fire, almost like closely packed slabs of heated iron. A real peat fire is one of the brightest and hottest things on earth.

"I will be very brief," he said at last. "Brief for your sakes and my own. You guess why I want you. It is to see, as my

last mortal vision, a man and woman who have conquered all by love. You know a little what love is to me. Well, in my last hours on earth, I would rather see two such than the brightest of God's angels."

We remained silent, but I heard a muffled sob from Thirza, and I could also see her husband's arm steal round her waist to draw her a little nearer to himself.

"Also, I want to tell you of a strange old tale, almost a legend, that I heard, years ago, from Mother French as she lay dying. It may be the clue to the mystery, or it may have been the fancies of delirium. No one will ever know."

He paused, raised himself a little and turned to George. Then, for the first time, he noticed our lowly attitudes.

"But, my children, you mustn't kneel," he exclaimed, almost distressed. "George, give the ladies the chairs."

George rose, fetched the two chairs over, placed them close together and close to the bed, and then, when we were seated, took his stand behind Thirza.

"You have heard of Mother French?" resumed the old man, looking up at George,

"Yes, sir. I've yeerd father tell of her for years ago. Her died, why——"

"Fifteen years ago," prompted the dying

man, as George hesitated. "She was a great age, as you know, and was always reckoned a wise woman. Well, it happened that she desired some messages of love as she lay dying, and she sent for me. I went, and was with her on and off for some time, for she lingered. Many strange things she said, for she talked much and wandered, often, in her talk. Her mind turned frequently to the Dart and the legend of the human heart seized yearly by its waters." Many instances she gave of some man, woman, or child who perished in that strange river, but one legend or tale or fancy—call it what you will—was strangest of all."

He paused for a time, and I saw Thirza steal her hand into George's like a frightened child. I confess that my own heart was still beating like a great hammer.

"It concerned some young wife who was walking beside the river one evening at dusk, with her husband and mother. She slipped in—how it did not ever appear—and was drowned before their eyes. The poor mother, frenzied with grief and terror, cursed the husband for his cowardice in not risking his own life to save his wife's, and when the poor girl disappeared for the last time, she cursed not only him, but every man who

should ever marry a woman of their race without loving her well enough to lay down his life for her. The mother's name was Thirza."

Suddenly Thirza sprang up with a cry and flung her arms round her husband's neck. He soothed her, without a word, but his face was perfectly white, and I could see that his strong hands trembled.

"The poor old woman, Mother French, used to lie muttering the same sentence over and over again, 'A mother's curse is a curse from God. Take care, young men, to love the maids of her blood better than yourselves, or your own blood 'll be shed before your first wedding-day.' Again and again she said it. I questioned her sometimes but she never told me any more. I never knew if she really understood what she was saying. And until you told me of this strange curse which seems to dog one family, Miss Beatrice, last January, I had never thought of the thing since. I did not tell you then," he continued, anticipating my first impulsive question, "because if—mind it is a big 'if,'—if there was any connection between it and this happy young pair, theirs was the victory by perfect love, and I could not, before the year was out, risk an elucidation which might mar their mighty trust in utter darkness."

Again he was interrupted by Thirza. This time she spoke, but in a voice so choked and shaking that we hardly recognised it.

"Great-grandmother was drowned in the Dart, I've yeerd uncle tell. And her mother was called Thirza."

An impressive silence filled the hut. I felt literally as if the whole place was spinning round with me.

It was the dying man who spoke at last. "'A mother's curse is a curse from God. Take care, young men, to love the maids of her blood better than yourselves, or your own blood 'll be shed before your first wedding-day.'"

Here poor Thirza's always scanty self-control failed her utterly. She broke into piteous sobbing and clung round her husband's neck convulsively.

"I b'leeve it, I b'leeve it," she moaned. "And 'tis you, George, that have beaten the wisht old curse. You've a loved me well enough to risk your life for me. You did 'fore us married, you have right through to now Us knows now for certain that love have conquered, and your dear blood haven't been shed, no, nor won't be, neither. Let therest go."

Here she became so agitated that George lifted her gently into his arms and bore her out into the open air.



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The old man watched them go. "Let the rest go," he echoed dreamily. "We shall never know. It may be reality or a fanciful legend or the ravings of delirium. All we know is that love has conquered, whatever danger did threaten. They are safe."

Still, for a long time, I could not speak. The whole thing was so strange, so incredible. My main emotion was that the year had passed without tragedy, and that Thirza's mind was at peace at last.

Then suddenly a great wave of compassion for the dying man swept out every other thought. Again I knelt down and took his hands.

"Dear father, but what of you?" I asked tremulously. It was all I could do not to burst out crying. He was so gentle, so good, so kind, and it broke my heart to think I should never see him again. "Let me stay with you through the night. Let me find others who would stay. How can I leave you alone like this—alone and dying? And may I not know who you are, if no friends would want to come to you? I can't bear to leave you like this."

He turned his face to me with a look that will last my life.

"My child, God will reward you for your

tender charity. If I feared or needed anything, be sure I should never send you from my side. Be quite sure of it. But I need nothing. And I am not alone."

He said it so gravely, so gently, that my rising tears were checked at their source. Who was I, weak earthling, to force my impious presence upon the mysteries of love immortalising?

"I am not alone. And there is no one left to come to me. Remember me, all your life, my child, simply as the pilgrim of love. God in His mercy has stooped to my weakness and helped me to love on to the very end."

As he finished, I rose. His words, the look on his face, told me that my further presence there would have been an intrusion. My tears, my sorrow, were hushed into perfect peace. I stooped to kiss his hands, then went to the doorway. Before passing out, I turned for one last look. He was heedless of my presence and I saw him raise himself on the bed, and open his arms wide to something, someone standing beside the hearth, someone whom I could not see. The next moment I was out on the vast dark moor with the quiet stars looking down from a cloudless sky.

## CHAPTER XXVI

AMOR OMNIA VINCET

**L**AST night I watched beside another deathbed—the passing of this strange, glad old year.

I stood at midnight high on Dream Tor, looking out over the moonlitten moor covered suddenly with her royal ermine of stainless snow.

All the world was one vast, white, brooding peace.

Far in the east lay the dim line of the lowlands and the pale haze of the sea. A distant harbour was jewelled with lights that glittered like yellow diamonds on the silver shield of the river, while the lighthouse flashed between sky and sea like a great revolving star.

Moorward, in the centre, rose the whitened crown of Bellever. Away northwards, crouched the threatening black heads of Hound Tor, near whose colossal shadow lies the desolate suicide's grave. That grave was the one

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dark place out of which springs no blossom of hope. For the poor girl whose bones lie there, life's story ended hopelessly wrong.

Yet while I gazed sadly northwards, slowly there rose within me the conviction that even in a life so sad as hers, love saves where hope is dead. After long purgation and tribulation, she and her lover are united somewhere in another world where love reigns happily for ever.

Such is my credo. I believe that in her last agony she, poor outcast, turned to God and threw herself on His infinite mercy, even as she died. To whom else can we turn when we are forsaken by man and utterly desolate? He knows, He knows, He knows—or He would not be God.

As I stood waiting, the bells made glad music down in the valley. The year went to his death in a shower of melody. At a quarter to midnight, however, the music ceased, and the tenor bell alone took up the message. Solemnly the "death dole" rang out to the listening moor. It tolled for a few minutes, then shivered away into absolute silence.

Instinctively I dropped on my knees in the warm snow. Something very real, very dear, was almost dead. It was leaving the vast

white vestibule of earth for the starlitten sanctuary of heaven.

Surely each year of life will come as an angel to attend on death when he stands beside us at last to summon us away.

The kindly, familiar, well-loved years of life! Surely they will rally round us when their number is complete, so that their friendly faces may give us courage to meet the King whose gift they are!

The silence was tense, breathless. There is no public clock in our village, so midnight cannot be proclaimed. But the passing of the year in this ineffable hush is far more impressive than any peal or chime.

As I knelt watching, listening, yet seeing and hearing nothing, suddenly the gay peal rang out again in greeting to the new-born year.

After a time I rose to my feet and greeted the year with dumb delight.

I thought of all the humble lovers in this obscure place, and I thought of dead Preacher John, the man with the mighty faith in the empire of love.

I looked long at Bellever, the core of the heart of the moor. I looked at the vast white reaches of the moor, and at the line of the Dart, that lover whom nothing less than

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the toll of a living heart can satisfy. And in them I saw love materialised. In them all I saw love, love living in the human hearts of the moor folk and handed on by men and women, generation after generation.

I saw that out of all evil, love rises triumphant at last. I saw that while the moor stands, clothed in her regal purple, as long as the Dart flows from her mighty bosom, so will love stand, royal, invincible ; so will love flow unfailing throughout all ages, subduing all things to himself before the end.

THE END









**"I realised that this place was my fate, that if I ever left her she would draw me back to her heart. . . ."**



*Beatrice Chase in her Widecombe garden*

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